PHOENIX

PROJEKT SAUCER: BOOK 2

W.A. HARBINSON

Phoenix

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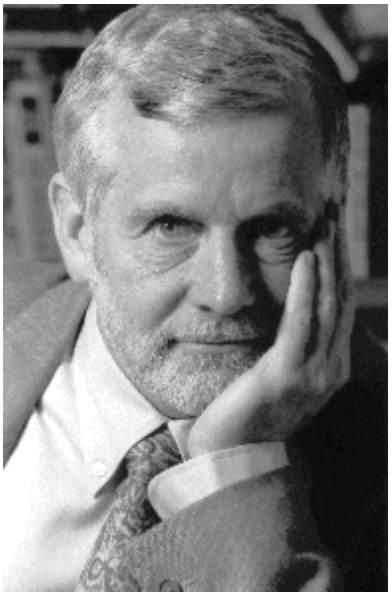
FOREWORD
THE ULTIMATE CONSPIRACY CONTINUES…

W.A.Harbinson first exposed the nightmarish truth about UFOs – a truth so terrifying that it could only be presented as fiction – in his international bestseller *Genesis*. Now he has taken the themes and many of the characters from that groundbreaking work and developed them into further dimensions of cosmic horror with other astounding novels in the PROJEKT SAUCER series. *Phoenix*, the second selfcontained *Projekt Saucer* epic, takes the story on from the end of the Second World War and through the postwar years of humankind's first tentative explorations of space. During this historic period, the sinister earthly forces behind the UFO conspiracy begin to show their hand more openly –and start to exert a deadly stranglehold on the destiny of the whole Earth…

PHOENIX*:** THE SECOND BOOK OF THE EPIC ***PROJEKT SAUCER SERIES.



W.A.Harbinson was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 1941. He left school at fourteen, studied mechanical engineering, then joined the Royal Australian Air Force. While serving in the RAAF he drafted his first novel, *Instruments of Death*. In 1980 he completed *Genesis*, the epic, bestseller novel that became the inspiration for the *Projekt Saucer* series. (*Phoenix* is chronologically the second novel in the series.) Harbinson has also written

short stories, radio plays and non-fiction books. He presently divides his time between Paris, France, and West Cork, Ireland. Also by W.A.Harbinson
Novels

Projekt Saucer, Book 1: *Inception* Projekt Saucer, Book 2: *Phoenix* Projekt Saucer, Book 3: *Genesis* Projekt Saucer, Book 4: *Millennium* Projekt Saucer, Book 5: *Resurrection*

Revelation

Otherworld

Eden

The Lodestone Dream Maker

The Crystal Skulls

Non-fiction

Projekt UFO: The Case for Man-Made Flying Saucers

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For
Perrott & Irena Phillips &
For Anna

PART ONE

Chapter One

SOCORRO, NEW MEXICO JULY 2, 1947

When that thing flew overhead Marlon Clarke could hardly believe what he was seeing. As he had been doing too often lately, he was sitting out on his porch, in his old rocking chair, slugging beer from the bottle, muttering under his breath and gazing out over the parched lands of his failed farm, flat and eerily desolate in moonlight. He was just a small farmer who'd had a bad few years and he liked to sit out there in the evenings, feeling bitter and murmuring angry words to himself, getting drunk enough to sleep without too much anxiety. Tired and thinking of bed, he had just glanced at his watch and noticed that it was ten-thirty when the whole porch shook a little, his last bottle of beer fell over, and he heard an exploding noise right overhead.

Shocked back to the real world, his heart racing too fast, he looked up to see a glowing, saucer-shaped object screeching, wobbling, spinning and pouring steam or smoke as it flew at tremendous speed across the night sky on a descending trajectory.

Before Marlon had a chance to get a grip on himself, the glowing object fell towards the Plain of San Augustin, between Magdalena and Socorro, about five miles from his farm, then turned into a growing fan of white and red flames in a billowing cloud of dust. The explosion came a second later, as the fan of flames grew bigger, illuminating the rising cloud of dust and obliterating the stars.

The blast rocked Marlon's house.

Startled into a state of near sobriety, he got out of his rocking chair as the fan of flame shrank back to a tiny flickering that soon disappeared, letting the star-studded night sky return.

'Kee-rist!' Marlon exclaimed softly. Instantly, on an impulse, both fearful and curious, he grabbed a bottle of whisky from the floor of the porch, hurried down the steps, clambered unsteadily into his battered old truck, and tore off towards the scene of the crash.

As he drove across the moonlit plain, through pale moonlight and the shadows of cacti and sagebrush, he controlled the steering wheel with one hand, held the bottle in the other, drank too quickly and felt his heart racing. It was the whisky, he guessed, but it was also what he had seen: that glowing, saucer-shaped flying object of the kind he'd heard so much about lately.

'Jesus!' he whispered to himself as the old, battered truck growled and rattled across the flat, windblown plain. 'Jesus H... I don't believe...'

He kept glancing outside the truck, growing more apprehensive, half expecting to see another of those objects gliding under the moonlight. He even thought of turning back, but his curiosity kept him going, and he convinced himself, even as his fear was growing, that it had just been an airplane.

He was wrong.

On the broad, flat plain near the town of Magdalena, about halfway between the road and the distant Black Mountain, he saw a dark pile of still smouldering debris. Driving off the road, he bounced over the rough, sage-strewn plain until he came to the location of the crash. Stopping the truck, he had another drink of whisky, wiped his lips with the back of his hand, then looked out at the smouldering debris.

It was the wreckage of a large, saucer-shaped craft, about half of it smashed to hell, the remainder a dull grey in the moonlight.

What looked like three scorched corpses were still strapped into the central cockpit of the crashed object.

‘Lord Almighty!’ Marlon exclaimed softly.

He was too scared to get out, but he had a good look, making sure that his eyes were not deceiving him. The object was round all right, shaped like two plates, one inverted and placed on top of the other. It was about twenty-five to thirty feet in diameter, obviously made of a metallic substance, and had smooth sides that rose gracefully, seamlessly to a smashed-up, transparent, domed cockpit. The charred bodies were still strapped to their seats.

That's when Marlon grew really scared. Blinking, rubbing his eyes, he looked out again.

The three corpses were burned beyond recognition. They were wearing greycoloured one-piece suits, or coveralls, which were charred black, in tatters and still smouldering like the pieces of metal scattered widely around the broken, circular craft.

Nauseated by the smell of roasted flesh, Marlon looked beyond the crashed object to the distant mountain range. It was black in the night, but covered with stars, its sides streaked with moonlight that also fell across the flat Plain of Magdalena. Marlon looked around him, expecting to see something else, but there was nothing out there but empty land and the wind's constant whispering.

Taking a final look at the charred bodies in the crashed flying saucer, he

shivered with revulsion and fear, then turned the truck around and burned back to his ranch.

When the men from the Roswell Army Air Base came to see him, Marlon was surprised by how many there were. They arrived in a jeep and troop truck as the sun was rising over the horizon to flood the flat plain with light. Marlon was still sitting in his rocking chair, more drunk than ever, when the armed troops jumped out of the truck to form a semi-circle around the yard, some with their backs turned to the house, others facing the empty plain, all holding their weapons at the ready.

More frightened than he had been by the sight of the crashed saucer, Marlon was wiping his dry lips with the back of his hand when a man in a plain grey suit, accompanied by a uniformed Air Force officer and two others in plain clothes, descended from the jeep and approached him. Stepping up onto the porch, the two in plain clothes hurried past Marlon and entered his house without his permission, slamming the mesh-wire door behind them. As Marlon was about to get out of his rocking chair and protest, the Air Force officer removed his peaked cap, revealing stark black hair and warm brown eyes in a slightly plump, friendly face. He offered a natural, easy smile.

‘Mr Clarke?’

‘Darn right,’ Marlon said. ‘And when I called, I didn't expect...’ He nodded back over his shoulder, indicating the two men who could now be heard noisily searching his home.

‘I’m sorry, Mr Clarke, but it’s necessary. I’m First Lieutenant William B.Harris of the Eighth Air Force, stationed at Roswell Army Air Base. The two men in your house are members of the intelligence team of the 509th Bomb Group, also at Roswell. And this… ‘ he indicated the unsmiling man in the plain grey suit... ‘is CIA agent, Jack Fuller, who’s flown here all the way from Langley, Virginia.’

‘You called about a crashed saucer, I believe,’ Fuller said in an oddly threatening tone of voice.

‘Right. It crashed last night, about ten. I was expecting you people a lot sooner. I’ve bin sittin’ here all night.’

‘I’m sorry about that,’ First Lieutenant Harris said, ‘but I had to wait for Mr Fuller to arrive.’

‘All the way from Langley, Virginia,’ Marlon said, glancing at the unsmiling Fuller who was, he noted, still under thirty, but had eyes as grey and wintry

as Antarctica. ‘You musta taken me serious.’
‘It’s strictly routine,’ Fuller informed him, sounding as cold as he looked. ‘It’s just one of the rules. All the flying saucer scares we’ve had since last month – ’
‘The Kenneth Arnold sightings.’
‘Right. They’re mostly false alarms, but they have to be checked out. That’s why I’m here.’
‘This is no false alarm.’
‘You actually saw the saucer?’
‘Sure did. It’s out there on the Plain of Magdalena with three dead bodies in it.’
Fuller glanced at Harris, then down at Marlon’s whisky bottle. ‘Have you been drinking, Mr Clarke?’
‘What do you think?’
‘I think you were drinking last night - you have a reputation for it - and just *imagined* you saw those dead bodies. I think you saw a crashed weather balloon, related it to all the flying saucer stories that have been in the papers since the Kenneth Arnold sightings, and let your imagination get the better of you.’
‘The hell with that,’ Marlon said, outraged. ‘I know what I saw there last night - and it wasn’t any goddamned weather balloon. It was big and made of metal and had three dead bodies in it. They were burnt all to hell.’
‘Come with us, Mr Clarke.’
Before Marlon could protest, Fuller took him by the shoulder and tugged him to his feet. Marlon jerked his head around, indicating the noisy search still going on in his shack, but Harris told him not to worry and walked at his other side as Fuller led him between the armed troops to the jeep and coaxed him up into the rear seat. Fuller sat beside him, Harris sat up front, then the driver took off along the road that ran as straight as an arrow across the flatlands, towards Magdalena.
Marlon's stomach was churning. The sight of the armed troops had scared him, the people searching his house more so, and now he was confused as well as frightened, not too sure if he had done the right thing in making that phone call. Jack Fuller, the CIA agent seated beside him, was only half Marlon’s age, but had a cold-eyed, obscurely threatening manner, never smiling, just watching. He was making Marlon feel as guilty as hell, though he didn't know what for. He had simply tried to behave like a responsible

citizen - reporting the crash and what he had seen - and now this Fuller was making him feel like a criminal, or even a madman. Thinking of all the stories he'd read about UFOs in the past few weeks (ever since the June sightings by Kenneth Arnold, the papers were full of them), he started wondering if he *had* imagined the whole thing.

Marlon desperately wanted another stiff shot of whisky, but the bottle was back on the porch where it could do him no good.

They covered the five miles in about ten minutes and soon were bumping over the flatlands, towards the crash site, which was, Marlon noted, now surrounded by armed troops just like his house. The sun was up and the heat made Marlon sweat; he was also sweating with nervous tension when the jeep braked to a halt, its wheels churning up a cloud of dust that spiralled around him and the others to be carried away on the moaning wind.

Marlon didn't have to get out of the jeep to express his surprise.

Fuller turned unyielding eyes upon him. 'Is this what you saw, Mr Clarke?'

It was not. Now, in the centre of that large circle of armed troops, where the flying saucer with the three dead bodies had been, Marlon saw only some white-smocked technicians picking up a thin scattering of silver-foil and narrow balsa-wood beams. There was no sign of the large flying saucers. No dead bodies. No ambulance.

'This isn't what I saw,' Marlon said. 'What I saw was – '

'This is what we found,' Fuller told him. 'The remains of a crashed Rawin weather balloon. Easily mistaken for flying saucers, Mr Clarke. We sometimes see what we want to see.'

'What do you mean by that?'

Fuller glanced at First Lieutenant Harris. 'One of the worst lightning storms we've had in a long time,' Harris explained with a gentle smile, 'took place about seventyfive miles south-west of here last night, about the same time as this weather balloon crashed. Since then, we've had lots of reports of unidentified flying objects in the vicinity. Most turned out to be natural phenomena caused by the storm. In other words, false alarms.'

Marlon felt more confused, but he knew what he had witnessed. No way were those pieces of silver-foil and balsa wood part of what he had seen here last night.

'That thing I saw last night was big - very big - and it had dead bodies in it.'

'It was night,' Fuller told him. 'You were drinking. You saw what you expected to see. Did you get out of your truck?'

‘No, but...’
‘So you’d been sitting out on your porch, drinking half the evening, then you saw this saucer-shaped object falling from the night sky about five miles away. Remembering all the stories you’d read in the papers this past few weeks, about socalled flying saucers, you assumed that’s what you’d seen, drove out here to find it, and maybe got scared when you *did* find it and imagined the rest.’
‘With all due respect, sir, that’s bullshit. I know what I saw.’
‘You were drunk and frightened.’
‘I’m more drunk now than I was last night, but that don’t mean I’m imagining all this.’ Marlon waved his hand to indicate the ring of armed troops and the whitesmocked men picking up pieces of silver-foil and balsa beams to load them into the army truck nearby. ‘And I’m telling you that what I saw last night was no weather balloon. It was at least twenty-five feet wide and had – ’
‘Dead bodies in it.’ Fuller sighed. ‘So where are the dead bodies, Mr Clarke? Where’s the large, presumably metallic, flying saucer?’
‘That’s right. It was metallic.’
Fuller smiled in a mocking way and pointed to the men carrying the debris of the weather balloon. ‘Silver-foil,’ he said. ‘It would look metallic in the dark. The moonlight, the drifting dust, your state of mind, the drink, combined could have made you see all the rest. Enough said, I think.’
‘Well, maybe...’ Marlon felt confused and nervous, no longer sure of his senses, and wished he could have a stiff drink to put his thoughts in some order. Okay, so he was drunk, but he wasn’t that dumb... and when he noticed a lot of tyre tracks leading away from just beyond this much smaller area of wreckage, heading towards Roswell, he was convinced that another team of men from the Roswell Army Air Base had cleared away the real wreckage and taken it back to the base.
Frightened, he decided to keep his nose clean and get involved no further. After wiping his dry lips with the back of his hand, he deliberately shook his head from side to side, as if chastising himself. ‘Dammit, I guess you must be right. I sure as hell hung one on last night. I guess that *could* explain it.'
He glanced again at the tyre tracks that started beyond the perimeter of armed troops, then at the truck into which the white-smocked men were putting the last of the debris from the weather balloon. ‘A weather balloon?’
Harris nodded and smiled at him. ‘Well, I’ll be damned,’ Marlon said like a

real country yokel. ‘It’s amazin’ what a man sees when he’s drunk. I feel a right goddamned fool now.’
‘No need,’ Harris said, raising the peak of his Air Force cap to offer a genuine, friendly smile. ‘You’d be surprised at what people think they see at nights - and these weather balloons, they fool a lot of people.’
‘Sure fooled me. Say, you haven’t got a drink in that there jeep?’
Harris smiled more broadly. ‘Nope, I’m afraid not. But you’ve still got that bottle on the porch and we’re going back now.’
‘Yeah, let’s do that.’ Pretending to be more drunk and tired than he was, Marlon glanced at the CIA agent, Jack Fuller, whose grey gaze was coolly searching, then at the white-smocked men who were still placing pieces of debris into the truck. Comparing the size of the craft he had seen last night and the much wider area of scattered debris with what he was seeing now, he was more convinced than ever that his senses had not deceived him as Fuller had suggested.
No, those tyre tracks clearly visible beyond the ring of armed troops belonged to the trucks that had taken the debris of the flying saucer, as well as its dead occupants, back to the Roswell Army Air Base. This coldly handsome young CIA agent, Fuller, and the friendlier Air Force First Lieutenant Harris were undoubtedly covering up the real crash. Convinced of this, Marlon became even more determined to keep his mouth shut. He was therefore relieved when the driver turned the jeep around and headed back to the ranch.
See no evil, hear no evil, Marlon thought, keeping his gaze fixed resolutely on the road ahead.
It was best to be silent.

Marlon awoke in the early hours of the morning, haunted by the remnants of bad dreams and frightening realities. At first confused about where he was, hardly remembering going to bed, he saw his bedroom in darkness, stars framed by the window, then recalled that crashed flying saucer and the three strange, scorched bodies. He groaned aloud, hearing something - *feeling* something - then remembered waving goodbye to Fuller and Harris as they drove away from his house, having grimly warned him to forget flying saucers and accept that what he had seen was a crashed weather balloon.

‘Shit,’ Marlon said, hearing something - *feeling* something - then realised that he’d been awakened by a strange bass humming sound that seemed

physical and made his head hurt. ‘Shit!’ he said. ‘What the hell...?’

The sound was growing louder, as if descending on his roof. As it did so, the whole house shook to the pulsations of a dazzling light that had suddenly obliterated the stars as it poured in through his window.

The house shook more violently as the pulsations became more rapid and the light blinded Marlon. The bass humming sound grew louder and more... *physical*, threatening to crush his skull.

He jerked upright on the bed and covered his ears with his hands, letting out a scream of anguish and terror.

The noise cut out abruptly and the pulsating light disappeared, leaving normal darkness, and... unnatural silence.

Marlon lowered his hands, staring fearfully at the window. Hearing and seeing nothing other than starlit darkness, he jerked the sheet from his sweating body and slid off the bed. He put his pants on, picked up his shotgun, then went to the window and looked out. Still seeing nothing unusual, he padded back to the front door and stepped out onto the porch.

A large, silvery, saucer-shaped craft was resting on the ground at the end of Marlon’s moonlit yard. It appeared to be seamless and had no protuberances other than four retractable legs.

It looked just like the crashed flying saucer that Marlon had seen on the Plain of Magdalena.

Even as a wave of fearful disbelief swept over him, making him drop the shotgun, which made a godalmighty clattering, the saucer suddenly gave off a bass humming sound that shook him to his bones, vibrated slightly, and became surrounded by an aura of pulsating white light. A transparent dome rose up from the saucer’s raised centre to reveal three human-shaped silhouettes inside. Then a beam of dazzling light shot from the saucer, almost blinding Marlon.

Crying out and covering his eyes with his hands, he fell back against the wall of the house. The light shone through his fingers, showing the blood beneath the skin, and the bass humming sound pressed in on his skull. Marlon slid down the wall, whimpering in pain and terror, until he was resting on the porch with his chin on his raised knees. Then the light faded away, the bass humming sound cut out, and he looked up as a trap door opened silently in the bottom of the saucer, tilting down to the ground.

Three men, all dressed in black to match the night, dropped out, one after the other.

They spread out across the yard to advance upon Marlon.
Something about those three men in black told him that they had come to take him away and that he could not escape.
Marlon just sat there, paralysed by terror, until the men stepped up on the porch and closed in around him. Then something exploded in his head and he sank down through spinning stars.

Chapter Two

Captain Dwight Randall, of the Air Technical Intelligence Centre, or the ATIC, was not feeling too happy when introducing himself to First Lieutenant William B. Harris, Flight Intelligence Officer of the Roswell Army Air Base. Back in Wright-Patterson AFB, in Dayton, Ohio, Dwight's wife, Beth, nursing their first child, Nichola, was also nursing her resentment because again he was on a trip away from home. She knew that he had no choice, being compelled to obey orders, but that hadn't helped him when he waved her goodbye for the third time in the four weeks since Nichola had been born. Dwight had optimistically promised her that he would be at home a lot more, at least during the first few months of their new baby's life, but unfortunately the recent, unexpected spate of UFO sightings had taken precedence over domestic matters. Now, as Dwight returned the salute of First Lieutenant Harris, then shook his hand, he felt guilty that he was here instead of in Dayton, looking after his family.

‘Please, Captain,’ Harris said, indicating the chair at the other side of his desk, ‘take a seat. Can I get you a coffee?’
Dwight glanced out the window at the distant aircraft hangars, then shook his head and sat in the chair. ‘No, thanks. I’ve drunk gallons since leaving Wright-Patterson, so I’ll beg off for now. Do you mind if I smoke?’ Harris just spread his hands in the air and offered a natural, charming smile, so Dwight lit up, inhaled, blew a smoke ring, and watched it drifting away... like a flying saucer. ‘So,’ he said, ‘I’ve been sent by the ATIC to investigate the so-called Socorro sighting of last week. Do you resent my intrusion?’
‘No, sir,’ Harris said. ‘My intelligence training didn’t include flying saucers, so any help I get will be appreciated. It’s also good to know that the Air Force, which has so strenuously denied the existence of the phenomenon, now has some tangible evidence.’
‘One of the functions of the Air Technical Intelligence Centre is to gather data on Unidentified Flying Objects. The fact that most of them turn out to be natural atmospheric phenomena may explain our former reluctance to

accept the reality of the UFOs.'

It was a disingenuous statement. What Dwight could not tell Harris was that contrary to the Air Force's own publicity it was in a state of near panic over a whole series of recent UFO sightings, particularly those over Muroc Air Base - the top secret Air Force test centre in the Mojave Desert - on July 8, just two days ago and six days after the Socorro sightings.

The first UFO flap had actually occurred in 1946 when, throughout the summer and fall, thousands of 'ghost rockets' appeared in the skies over Scandinavia and Western Europe. Mostly seen at night, they were reported as being 'cigar-shaped' and with flames issuing from the tail. Estimates of their speed ranged from that of a 'slow airplane' to 500 miles per hour. In the month of July alone, the Swedish military received more than 600 reports, which encouraged the Swedish general staff to declare the situation 'extremely serious.' Then, when sightings of the unidentifieds spread out from Sweden to Finland and close to the Soviet border, the Americans also took the phenomenon seriously - certainly enough to express their fear that the rockets might be secret weapons developed by the Russians with the help of the captured German technical specialists and material.

Their fears were in no way eased by the knowledge that whereas the mysterious 'Foo fighters' had not shown up on radar, the ghost rockets certainly had, and therefore could not be classified as hoaxes, misidentifications or the products of mass hallucination.

The Soviets denied any knowledge of the rockets, but US suspicions remained unabated while the rockets continued to fly and be reported from as far afield as Greece, Turkey, French Morocco and Spain, before gradually fading away the following year.

However, on June 21, 1947, only a couple of weeks ago, a harbour patrolman, Harold Dahl, accompanied by his fifteen-year old son and two crewmen, was on harbour patrol near Maury Island in Puget Sound, off Tacoma, Washington, when he observed six objects shaped like 'inflated inner tubes' hovering about 2,000 feet above his boat. Five of the objects were circling about the sixth as it descended to about five hundred feet above the boat, where, appearing to hover magically, it was seen more clearly. The object appeared to be about a hundred feet in diameter, metallic, with no jets, rockets, wings, or propellers, but with a 'hole' in the centre, or base, symmetrically placed portholes around the perimeter, and observatory windows on its underside. After discharging what appeared to be a cloud of

aluminiumcoloured debris, which littered the sea, where they gave off clouds of steam, suggesting that they were hot, the circular craft ascended to rejoin the others, then they all flew at high speed toward the open sea and soon disappeared.

Three days later, on June 24, an American businessman, Kenneth Arnold, reported that when flying his private Piper Club airplane near Mount Rainier in the Cascades, Washington, searching for the debris of the Marine Corps C-46 transport that had crashed against the south shoulder of Mount Rainier the night before, he observed nine disk-shaped, apparently metallic objects flying in ‘a diagonal chain-like line’ and making an undulating motion ‘like a saucer skipping over water.’ According to Arnold's report, the objects performed impossible manoeuvres in the sky, before flying off at supersonic speed to disappear in the direction of the Canadian border.

As Arnold had been a deputy sheriff and was a reputable businessman, as well as an experienced mountain air-rescue pilot, his story was taken seriously and the term ‘flying saucer’ came into being. It was therefore used widely over the next few weeks when the media spread Arnold’s story nation-wide and encouraged a spate of similar sightings, many of which were hoaxes, some of which were by trained observers and seemed highly credible.

By this time the US military authorities, while publicly ridiculing the reported sightings, were secretly in a state of panic over their own plague of UFO sightings: the first, on June 28, over Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama; the next, on June 29, near Alamogordo, New Mexico, right over the top-secret White Sands Proving Ground; then, on July 8, a whole spate of sightings of spherically shaped, white aluminium-coloured objects flying over Muroc Air Base, the supersecret air force test centre in the Mojave Desert. Because those particular sightings were made by trained technicians and pilots, and because the reported objects were appearing increasingly over top-and-supersecret military research bases, a growing suspicion in intelligence circles was that the men and material deported from Nazi Germany to Russia had led to a dangerous Soviet lead in space technology. And now one of the damned things had crashed and all hell had broken loose.

‘Anyway,’ Dwight continued, ‘the so-called Socorro sighting has caused a hell of a stir in the media and placed us in an uncomfortable position. I believe you're the one who compiled the first official report on it.’

‘Yes, sir. I take it you’ve read it.’
‘About a dozen times,’ Dwight told him. ‘I kept re-reading it because I couldn’t believe my own eyes.’ He withdrew Harris’s report from the briefcase on his lap, leafed through it, then looked up again. ‘You say the UFO appeared to have suffered damage in a lightning storm near Roswell, but managed to fly on to Magdalena, where it crashed. It was a real flying saucer - or at least a disc-shaped aircraft – and the wreckage contained three dead bodies. Naturally the report came as a shock. Are you sure...?’
‘I stand by that report,’ Harris said, brushing a lock of dark hair back from his brown, candid gaze and offering a slight, nervous smile. He looked like an honest, reliable officer, but clearly he was uncomfortable over this matter. ‘What that farmer told me, I was able to confirm with my own eyes: a crashed flying saucer with three dead bodies in it.’
‘Marlon Clarke was the farmer.’
‘Yes, sir.’
‘A known drunkard who was drinking at the time.’
‘Not that drunk - and I confirmed with my own eyes what he’d told me when he phoned us shortly after finding the wreckage.’
‘You say the bodies seemed human.’
‘They were burnt beyond recognition and I couldn’t examine them thoroughly, but they certainly *seemed* like human beings.’
‘This is quite a story, lieutenant, but not one I’d want public. How the hell did it get out to the press?’
‘Not guilty. The story was picked up by Johnny McBoyle, reporter and part owner of Radio KSWS in Roswell. McBoyle personally investigated the case and found that a lot of people had reported seeing the UFO flying overhead. Others reported hearing a loud banging sound as the object flew through that lightning storm over Corona - presumably when it was first damaged. Others reported hearing an explosion from the Plain of Magdalena - when the object crashed. As soon as I heard that McBoyle was going to put the story out on the teletype, I blocked the message with one of my own
- sent anonymously, of course - telling him not to transmit. That scared him enough to make him cancel his transmission. Unfortunately, the following day, our enthusiastic young public information officer, Lieutenant Walter Haut, acting on odd bits of information coming into Roswell, issued a press release without the authorisation of myself or the base commander. His vague story of a crashed saucer - no mention of the dead bodies – was

subsequently published in the Roswell *Daily Record* of July 8 - the day after the crash. Hunt has been reprimanded and will probably be posted out of here.'

'Alas, too late to kill the story.'

'I'm afraid so.'

Dwight turned over another page in the report, then looked up again. 'The saucer wreckage and dead crew members have been removed from the scene of the crash?'

'Yes, sir. We did that immediately. At the insistence of no less than the Deputy Chief of the Air Force, General Hoyt Vandenburg, the three charred bodies and the debris from the crash were picked up by an intelligence team from the 509th Bomb Group and transported in strict secrecy to Carswell AFB, Fort Worth, Texas. There's no trace of it left at the crash site.'

'Subsequently you paid Clarke a visit.'

'Yes, sir. On the instructions of CIA agent Jack Fuller, we scattered the pieces of a Rawin weather balloon around the crash site and went through a charade of picking them up for examination when Fuller and I took Clarke back out there. We insisted it was the balloon that had crashed and that Clarke had simply imagined the dead bodies. Clarke finally pretended to believe us, but I don't think he did.'

'I better have another talk with this Clarke.'

'You can't. He vanished the day after the crash and hasn't been seen since.'

'*Vanished?'*

'Completely. We've searched high and low, but we can't track him down. Neither could the Roswell *Daily Record*. He's vanished into thin air.'

Dwight leaned forward in his chair, suddenly feeling cold and frightened. 'Christ, you must have *some* idea of what happened to him. This is a small, intimate community, Lieutenant. Someone must know *something*.'

Harris simply shrugged and raised his hands in a gesture of defeat. 'No-one knows anything. When we checked Clarke's shack, we found his bed unmade - suggesting he'd slept in it the night before. His old truck was still parked out the back. The only clue to his disappearance was what might have been a group of footprints in the earth, leading from the steps of the porch to just outside the front yard, where they stopped abruptly. There were no signs of tyre tracks, but a circular patch of brush, about twenty-five feet wide, was flattened and slightly singed in an odd way - I mean, not from the sun. A real mystery there.'

‘A circular patch of brush, about twenty-five feet wide - approximately the same size and shape as the crashed saucer.’
‘Right. It bears thinking about.’
‘What’s the story on Bradley? It says here that as soon as you received word of the crash, you invited former intelligence officer, now UFO authority, Mike Bradley to go with you to view the crash. Bradley, normally obsessed with flying saucers, surprised you by not turning up and by later refusing to discuss his reasons. Has he talked to you since?’
‘I haven't been in touch with him since.’
‘Can we drive out and see him right now?’
‘Yes. He lives out in Eden Valley, near Robert Goddard’s old rocket-launching ground. It’s not a long drive.’
‘Okay, let’s go.’
Dwight slipped the report back into his briefcase and got to his feet while Harris phoned through for a jeep to come around and pick them up. The jeep was waiting for them by the time they got outside. Dwight glanced up as three F-86 jet interceptors roared over the great semicircular hangars along the edge of the runway, under a cloudless blue sky. He did it automatically, perhaps looking for a flying saucer, and felt instantly foolish when he realised what he had done.
Sitting beside First Lieutenant Harris in the rear of the jeep being driven by a U.S. Air Force corporal, Dwight put his head back, closed his eyes, and let the beating wind cool his face as they left the base and headed for Eden Valley, just outside Roswell. Opening his eyes again, he saw the El Capitán Mountain rising from the foothills near the southwestern horizon and, to the east, the sunlit slopes of the Caprock where, within living memory, the Comanche Indians, Spanish explorers, and even Billy the Kid had roamed. It therefore seemed incredible that this same area was already filled with highly advanced defence installations, including atomic research, aircraft, missile and rocket development, and a lot of highly advanced radarelectronics and stratospheric flight experimentation. Not far away, in Los Alamos, was the top-secret Manhattan atom bomb project. The White Sands Missile Range and Proving Range, at Alamogordo, was the most important of its kind in the United States. Also, the only combat-trained atom bomb group in the world was the 509th Bomb Group of the US Army Air Force Base, located right here in Roswell and given high prominence in Harris’s report. This area was also, incidentally, the one producing the most

UFO reports in the whole country, most of them by professional pilots and military observers.

Dwight sighed, thinking of the recent spate of saucer sightings that had overturned his life in the past month: first the Harold Dahl and Kenneth Arnold sightings in Washington State, then the spate of sightings over various top-secret military establishments right here in New Mexico. Recalling those sightings, he realised that he was getting into something truly unknown, perhaps even dangerous.

He was also working too much for his own good, which was upsetting Beth. Imagining her back in their small house in Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, Ohio, breast-feeding baby Nichola, he swelled up with love and concern for her. Then, to distract himself from his feeling of loss, he went back to reading First Lieutenant Harris's report.

Harris had included a brief resumé of Bradley's career, so Dwight knew he was about to meet an impressive man. Bradley had been a biplane pilot during World War I, spent a good many years as a successful Wall Street lawyer, became a member of OSS during World War II, and was known to have been involved in a major intelligence operation in occupied Europe. The exact nature of that operation was still top secret, though it certainly concerned German secret weapons. Badly wounded in an explosion at Kiel harbour during the last days of the war, Bradley had recovered, been discharged from OSS, married a former Roswell *Daily Record* reporter, Gladys Kinder, and moved back to Roswell with her. Now, when not making a living by the drafting of contracts between the many US Air Force and civilian aeronautical establishments in the area, he was conducting his own investigations into UFO sightings.

Bradley's interest in UFOs, Dwight was convinced, related directly to what he had discovered during his intelligence gathering in Germany during the war. Why he had rejected First Lieutenant Harris's invitation to check out the Socorro UFO crash site was therefore a matter for some concern.

'Apart from the formal resumé contained in your report,' Dwight said as the jeep crossed the sun-scorched flatlands between Roswell and Eden Valley, 'what do you know about Mike Bradley?'

'He's been to the base a few times to discuss UFO sightings with me. He's intelligent, good humoured and, given his background, unpretentious. A lot of experience in his face, a kind of air of quiet authority, but also something guarded, even secretive. He never talks about the war. Says his work is still

classified. I wouldn't call him the obsessive type, but he's certainly obsessed with UFOs. That's what keeps us in touch.'
'And his wife?'
'A terrific lady. Bit of a local character. Used to be a reporter on the Roswell *Daily Record* and was known to be as tough as any man. Still is, in fact. Likes to wear Stetsons and high-heeled boots. Pretty sharp with her tongue, too.'
'How did she meet Bradley?'
'He was out here in 1931, trying to run down a physicist – called Wilson, as I recall – who'd worked for Robert H. Goddard on his rocket experiments in Eden Valley. Reportedly, Gladys was briefly involved with Wilson and Bradley went to see her about him. I don't know if anything occurred between them here in Roswell, but certainly they met up in London, England, during the war, after Bradley's wife had been killed at Pearl Harbour. Bradley and Gladys seem unusually close and are popular locally.'
'When did Bradley's obsession with UFOs begin?'
'For him it's more specific than unidentified flying objects – it's flying saucers. He's been interested in them as long as I've known him. We first met a few weeks after he arrived here with Gladys, which was about four months after the war, about November or December, 1945. I met him at a welcome home party given for Gladys by her old buddies on the Roswell *Daily Record*. As soon as Bradley learnt I was the Flight Intelligence Officer at Roswell, he pinned me to the wall to enquire if I ever received reports of saucer or disc-shaped aircraft. This, mind you, was about twenty months before the first sightings by Harold Dahl and Kenneth Arnold. Of course I'd never had reports of any such thing - at least not until last month - and when I asked him why he wanted to know about them, he just murmured vaguely about his interest in unusual airplane configurations. After that, he regularly asked me if I'd received any unusual reports, but until last month, I'd nothing to give him.'
'Then, remarkably, when you had that report on a crashed saucer, he failed to show.'
'Right,' Harris said. 'Damned amazing - and he won't tell me why.'
'Maybe this time we'll be lucky,' Dwight said as the ranch-style house on the edge of Eden Valley came into view.
'Yeah,' Harris said. 'Maybe.'
The driver braked to a halt by the gate of the front yard, causing a cloud of

dust to boil up around the jeep. Dwight slipped out his side of the vehicle, waving the dust from his face, then was dazzled by sunlight as he walked up the yard path, beside First Lieutenant Harris. When Harris rang the bell, a woman came to the door. She was tall and lean, wearing a long belted dress with high-heeled boots, and had a head of short-cropped, greying brown hair, which made her seem slightly mannish. Her grey eyes were disconcertingly steady over a full-lipped, sardonic smile.
‘Bill Harris!’ she exclaimed as her gaze flicked inquiringly to Dwight. ‘What brings you here?’
‘We’ve come to see Mike.’
‘Who’s your friend?’
‘This is Captain Dwight Randall, of the Air Technical Intelligence Centre, based at Wright-Patterson AFB, in Dayton, Ohio. He’s here to investigate the Socorro sighting.’
‘Mike doesn’t know anything about that.’
‘Dammit, Gladys,’ Harris said, smiling with considerable charm, ‘stop giving us a hard time and at least invite us in for a coffee.’
‘It isn’t coffee you want, Bill.’
‘Okay, it isn’t coffee we want. But can we at least step inside and talk to Mike?’
‘What about? He knows nothing about the Socorro sighting. As you know, he didn’t go to the crash site with you.’
‘Yeah, I know,’ Harris said. ‘And what I now want to know is - why? He’s been hounding me about saucer-shaped aircraft since he came to live here - and then, when one actually crashes, he doesn’t turn up when he’s invited. Why?’
‘Who is it, Gladys?’ The man asking the question appeared in the doorway behind Gladys. In his early fifties, he was short but muscular in an open-necked sky-blue shirt and denims. Though grey-haired, he was handsome, but the skin on the right side of his face was livid from severe burning caused by the explosion at Kiel harbour in 1945. ‘Bill!’ he said, sounding pleasantly surprised. ‘Hi! Come on in.’
Gladys rolled her eyes, but opened the door and stepped aside. ‘This,’ she said, indicating Dwight, ‘is - ’
‘Captain Randall, of the Air Technical Intelligence Centre,’ Dwight said, holding out his hand. ‘Call me Dwight.’
‘Dayton, Ohio?’ Bradley asked, shaking his hand.

‘Correct.’
‘Welcome to Roswell.’ He started leading them into the living room, but when Gladys mentioned that they were here about the Socorro sighting, he stopped in his tracks, blocking their way. ‘The Socorro sighting? Why come to see me? I know nothing about it.’
‘That’s the point,’ Dwight said. ‘First Lieutenant Harris here tells me you’re fascinated by disc-shaped aircraft, or flying saucers, and yet you didn’t turn up at the crash scene when you were invited. Why was that, Mister Bradley?’
‘I just didn’t feel inclined.’
‘You hound First Lieutenant Harris for a year-and-a-half about disc, or saucershaped, aircraft and then, when he tells you one has crashed, you don’t feel inclined? Do you expect us to believe that, Mister Bradley?’
‘Why not? I just lost interest in the subject.’
‘But when I rang you,’ Harris said, ‘you didn’t sound like you’d lost interest. In fact, you sounded real excited and said you were going to meet me at the main gate of the air base to join me on the trip to the crash site. So what stopped you, Mike?’
Bradley glanced at his wife, then turned a closed gaze back to Harris. ‘I’m sorry, Bill, but I just changed my mind. The reasons are personal.’
‘You must have changed your mind shortly after he rang you,’ Dwight said. ‘What kind of personal reason could make you change your mind so quickly?’
Now Bradley wasn’t smiling. ‘That’s my business, Captain.’
‘And you still insist you’re no longer interested in UFOs?’
‘You’re not deaf,’ Gladys said aggressively. ‘You heard what he said.’
‘I heard, Mrs Bradley, but I find it hard to believe.’
‘That’s your problem.’
Dwight turned back to Mike Bradley as Harris became embarrassed. ‘Would you mind at least telling me what stirred your interest in UFOs in the first place?’
‘Like a lot of folks, I was intrigued by the Kenneth Arnold sightings.’
‘Which took place a month ago. First Lieutenant Harris tells me you’ve been interested in disc, or saucer-shaped, aircraft from the moment you first came to Roswell, at the tail end of 1945 - about twenty months before the recent sightings.’
‘Okay, I’ll admit that.’

‘Long before there was any talk of so-called flying saucers.’
‘Right,’ Bradley said, looking uncomfortable.
‘Which means you picked up the interest during, or just after, the war. Is that also correct?’
‘I can’t answer that question.’
‘Because the job you did for OSS was classified?’
‘Correct,’ Bradley said. ‘Now, I think - ’
‘You better leave,’ Gladys said. ‘My husband doesn’t want to discuss this any further.’
Dwight ignored her. ‘What happened on the night of July second, Bradley, after First Lieutenant Harris called you about that crashed saucer. What stopped you from turning up to see what you’d been so desperate to find?’
‘I’ve nothing more to say,’ Bradley responded, his face more flushed than the livid flesh on his right cheek.
‘Whatever it was that stopped you, it also made you give up your UFO investigations. Isn’t that the truth, Mr Bradley?’
‘Goodnight, gentlemen. Goodbye.’ Bradley turned away and disappeared back into the house as Gladys, with a grim, no-nonsense expression, pushed them out through the front door. ‘You heard the man,’ she said harshly. ‘Now get the hell out of here.’
‘Does the name “Wilson” ring a bell, Mrs Bradley?’ Dwight boldly asked her.
She looked startled, then blushed.
‘Back in 1931, when you first met your husband, he was investigating a physicist called Wilson, who’d worked right here, in Eden Valley, with Robert H.Goddard. I believe you knew Wilson, Mrs Bradley.’
‘I don’t know what you’re talking about,’ Gladys said, then slammed the door in their faces.
Dwight stared at the closed door in amazement, then at the uneasy Harris.
‘Well, I’ll be damned,’ Harris said. ‘I knew Bradley wouldn’t be keen to talk, but I’ve never known him or Gladys to be *that* unfriendly.’
‘They’re both frightened,’ Dwight said. ‘They’re just trying to cover it up. Come on, let’s get out of here.’
They stepped down off the porch, climbed into the jeep, and let the corporal drive them away, back across the parched flatlands on the edge of Eden Valley. Dwight thought of the rockets that Robert H. Goddard had launched from this desolate area, then tried making the connection between Goddard,

whom Bradley had visited once or twice with regard to the mysterious Wilson, and Bradley's later obsession with disc-or-saucer-shaped flying objects. He came to a blank wall.

'Bradley was obsessed with UFOs,' Harris said like a man in a trance of bewilderment. 'I just can't figure what's scared him.'

'*You're* scared,' Dwight informed him. 'First a flying saucer crashes, then it's spirited away to Carswell, then the only civilian witness to its existence disappears, and now Bradley and his wife have clammed up and won't discuss UFOs. So you're scared... with good reason.'

'Yes, sir, that's right, I'm scared. What about you?'

'Yeah,' Dwight confessed, glancing up to be dazzled by the brilliant, vast, empty sky. 'I'm scared too, I guess.'

Chapter Three

Wilson, Ernst Stoll, Hans Kammler and Artur Nebe were together in the underground viewing bay as the *Kugelblitz II*, a twenty-five-foot diameter, piloted flying saucer, descended at hovering speed through the deep well formed by a circle of soaring, icecapped mountain peaks. Its lights were flashing kaleidoscopically around its sharp outer edge, but its bass humming sound, the infrasounds of its power source, which could tighten a human skull at a certain intensity, was blocked off by the thick plateglass window of the viewing bay. Eventually, the saucer started settling gently on the steel-plated landing pad constructed at ground level in the cavernous space hacked out of the snow-covered Antarctic rock.

The base seemed to be underground, but was actually at ground level and hidden from the view of pilots flying overhead by an umbrella of soaring, snow-capped mountain peaks. However, working from this valley floor, beginning during World War II, Wilson's *Sklavenarbeiter*, or slave labour, under the ruthless supervision of the former SS officers, Stoll, Kammler and Nebe, had worked night and day at hacking their way into the base of the mountain to create aircraft hangars, workshops, laboratories, the first two of what would be many landing pads for the flying saucers, offices, staff accommodations, and underground quarters for the slave labour.

The slaves had originally been shipped out from the occupied territories of Nazi Germany and, more recently, abducted from various countries and flown here in Wilson's flying saucers. Only two were operating right now, but more were being constructed. Within five years there would be a whole fleet of them, each one better than the last, with no end to their technological

evolution in sight. If not feeling pride (a redundant emotion) Wilson certainly felt satisfied as he watched the saucer rocking lightly on its base before finally settling down.

Its bass humming sound receded into silence, then its flashing lights winked off one by one. The arc lights powered by self-charging generators and fixed high up on the walls of solid rock, to illuminate the gloomy, cavernous landing area, gave the saucer's metallic grey surface a silvery sheen. It looked alien and beautiful.

The other saucer was at rest beside it, but covered in a tarpaulin. Both were surrounded by white-coated technicians and slaves, men and women alike, dressed in identical, dark grey coveralls that just about kept out the biting cold. It was not the Antarctic cold, since that had been reduced by the installation of phase-change solarheat pumps that could store enough energy to also get the colony through the long Antarctic night; but it remained cold enough to be uncomfortable for the unfortunate labour force.

Now, as the *Kugelblitz II* settled down on the landing pad on its four retractable hydraulic legs, the technicians, armed guards and *Sklavenarbeiter* moved in to surround it. As the latter placed steel stepladders along the sloping sides of the saucer, to begin checking and polishing its seamless sides, a trap-door opened in the base, sloping downwards, and a slim man dressed in a pinstripe suit lowered himself to the landing pad and looked around in a dazed, disbelieving manner, before the armed guards closed in upon him. A second man emerged from the saucer almost immediately, this one big, bulky and wearing dirty bib-and brace coveralls. He, too, looked around him as if dazed, until he was surrounded by the armed guards and led away with the first man.

'Good,' Kammler said. 'They caught both of them.' Blond and blue-eyed, he glanced at the dark-eyed Nebe, who merely nodded solemnly and stroked the pistol strapped around his waist. Both men, like Wilson and Ernst Stoll, were wearing heavy roll-neck pullovers under thick coats and trousers. All of their clothing was coloured black.

Wilson nodded and smiled. He was feeling good today. He needed advanced prosthetic replacements for his artificial elbow joints and the man they had captured could do the job - that and many others. Sometimes it all seemed so simple. Faith could move mountains.

The two men surrounded by guards moved out of view far below, approaching the lifts that would carry them up to the upper level of the

colony, occupied by Wilson and his most senior staff, including those now grouped around him. He glanced at Ernst Stoll, once an enthusiastic rocket engineer, then an SS policeman, now an embittered, therefore malleable, administrator responsible for the collection and welfare of the slave labour. Stoll was looking down at the parked flying saucer, showing little emotion. He had left his heart and soul in conquered Germany; now he lived for this colony. Wilson was satisfied.

‘Let’s go and greet them,’ he said, turning away from the window and leaving the viewing bay through doors that led into a gloomy corridor hacked out of the inside of the mountain. The corridor led into a larger, brighter room, which also overlooked the landing area for the saucers, but contained comfortable armchairs and settees on an Italian-tiled floor partially covered by large Moroccan carpets. The wall overlooking the landing area was mostly thick plate-glass framed by ugly reinforced concrete. The back wall had been hacked out of the mountain and was simply the original rock covered in concrete and damp-proofing black paint. The two side walls were also of reinforced concrete, but contained steel-plated doors, one of which was for the lift, with a row of indicator lights above it. As Wilson entered the room with his entourage behind him, the lights came on one by one, indicating that the lift was ascending. The light stayed on at the marking for the fifth level.

When the lift doors opened, the two captives emerged, being prodded by the automatic weapons of two guards wearing old SS uniforms. The slim, grey-haired man in the pinstripe suit and tie was, Wilson knew, Dr Paul King, of the Powered Limbs Unit of West Hendon Hospital, London, England. The bigger man in the dirty brace-and-bib coveralls was the farmer, Marlon Clarke, who had witnessed the crashed flying saucer near Magdalena, New Mexico. The sophisticated Dr King, while clearly bewildered and frightened, was in control of himself; the other one,

Clarke, was terrified and practically dribbling.

‘Dr King?’ Wilson said, as if this meeting and the circumstances were routine. ‘Yes,’ King replied, his voice admirably calm, though his eyes betrayed confusion

and fear. ‘Who are you? Where am I?’

‘My name is Wilson. You will address me as that. You’re in a colony located inside a mountain in Neu Schwabenland, or Queen Maud Land, in Antarctica. You

are here as my prisoner.’
Clarke started sobbing, uncontrollably, like a child, wiping the tears from his cheeks with a grubby hand as he stared down at his own feet.
‘Oh, Christ,’ he said. ‘Oh, Jesus, I don’t believe... Oh, God help me, I’m dreaming.’
‘No, Mr Clarke, you’re not dreaming. Nor are you imagining things. This is real.
We are real. What’s puzzling you, Dr King?’
‘Something about your face.’
‘I’m seventy-seven years old, doctor, but look fifteen years younger. My face lacks
a certain mobility due to crude plastic surgery. I also need improving in other ways,
which is why I need you.’
‘Oh, Jesus,’ Clarke sobbed. ‘Why me? What the hell am I doing here?’
‘You’ve been brought here,’ Wilson informed him, ‘because you were unfortunate
enough to witness the debris of a crashed flying saucer and its three dead crew
members. We can’t permit you to talk about it, so you’re here to be silenced.’ Clarke
burst into tears again as Wilson turned to the other man. ‘As for you, Dr King, you’re
fortunate enough to be one of the world’s leading specialists in research into the
myoelectric control of external prosthetics, or artificial limbs. You’ll therefore be
invaluable to this community and need have no fear if you co-operate.’ ‘Co-operate?’ King asked as Marlon Clarke sobbed hysterically beside him. ‘What
do you mean?’
‘This is a secret community devoted to science,’ Wilson explained, ‘with no moral
impediments to progress. We’ll do anything necessary, no matter how ruthless, for
the advancement of the technology we’re creating. We’re a society of masters and

slaves, scientists and their servants, and we live beyond the reach of so-called
civilisation and its antiquated moral constraints. You are either for us or against us,
Dr King - willing worker or slave. The choice is all yours.'
'I think I'm dreaming,' King said. 'I just can't accept this.'
'Don't be as foolish as him,' Wilson warned, indicating the sobbing Clarke, 'by
putting this down to imagination or dreaming. This is real, Dr King, and it cannot be
stopped. Outlawed by the world we may be, but we're well out of reach. The saucers
are my creation and just the tip of the iceberg. My ultimate purpose is a new kind of
man, both physically and mentally: the mythical superman made real in a world based
on logic, not emotion. We're a unique community, Dr King, and you will be part of
it.'
'What if I refuse?'
'You don't have a choice. Either you do it willingly or we compel you to do it. We
have our ways, Dr King, and you can't escape from here. Outside this mountain is the
Antarctic wilderness. Where would you go?'
As the full implication of what Wilson was saying struck home to Clarke, he sobbed more profusely and visibly started shaking. When Wilson nodded, one of the
guards took hold of Clarke's elbow and managed to steady him. Dr King, though
clearly frightened, remained in control of himself and stared about him in wonder. 'I take it you're human beings,' he said, turning back to Wilson, 'and not creatures
from outer space.'
Wilson smiled coldly. 'Alas, yes, we're all too human.'
King glanced at Stoll, Kammler and Nebe, then nodded, indicating the armed

guards. ‘You look like a bunch of Nazis to me.’
‘I’m an American,’ Wilson said, ‘but one without political allegiance. These men,
it is true, were in the SS, but all that is behind them now. There are no nationalities
here; we’ve all disowned that. Here, our only religion is science. We don’t worship
false gods.’
‘I know I’m not dreaming,’ King said, ‘but I still can’t accept this. I don’t know
who you are or how long you’ve been here, but you won’t be able to stay. Sooner or
later, the West will learn about you and put a stop to your madness.’
‘Some of them know we’re here,’ Wilson said, ‘but they can’t get us out. No one
can get us out of here. No one has the technology.’
‘I don’t believe that,’ King said.
‘It’s true,’ Wilson insisted. ‘The US government knows we are here, but they can’t
get us out.’
‘You mean they’ve already tried?’
‘Yes. Last January they launched the biggest Antarctic expedition in history,
Operation Highjump, led by the explorer and naval officer, Rear-Admiral Richard
E.Byrd. The resources of the assault force, which was disguised as an exploratory
expedition, included thirteen ships, two seaplane tenders, an aircraft carrier,
six twoengine R4D transports, six Martin PBM flying boats, six helicopters, and a total of
4,000 men. When this supposedly invincible assault force reached the Antarctic coast,
it docked, on January 12, near Queen Maud Land, or Neu Schwabenland, then
divided up into three separate task forces. When the expedition ended, in February, a
lot earlier than anticipated, there were numerous stories in the press about
RearAdmiral Byrd’s references to enemy fighters that came from the Polar

regions and
could fly from one Pole to the other with incredible speed. The machines to which he
was referring are the kind that brought you here and were created by me in Nazi
Germany. As for Admiral Byrd's mission, it was deemed a disaster and the United
States has since declared that it's withdrawing from the Antarctic for at least a
decade. They know they can't get us out of here. They don't have the technology.' Dr King did not reply, but he licked his lips and glanced about him, still in a state
of disbelief, trying to accept the reality of this nightmare as the farmer, Marlon Clarke, sniffed back his tears and looked frantically around him, his eyes stunned by
dread.
Ever curious about human emotions, since he had so few himself, Wilson decided
to take the confused, disbelieving Dr King and terrified Marlon Clarke on a tour of
the colony.
'Come,' he said. 'Follow me.'
Confident that neither King nor Clarke would try to escape, since there was
nowhere to go, Wilson nodded at the armed guards, who put up their weapons and
left the room through the door leading to the corridor. Wilson then entered the lift,
followed by Dr King and the dribbling Clarke, then Stoll, Kammler and Nebe. Stoll
pressed the button for the third level. When the lift had descended and the doors
opened again, Wilson led the group out into a clamour of hammering, pneumatic
drilling, and echoing voices.
Another tunnel, being hacked out of the mountain, was being walled and roofed
with reinforced concrete and steel wiring. As Wilson led King and Clarke

through
churning dust in the arc-lit gloom, it was clear that the work was being done by the
filthy men and women who slaved under gunpoint and to the cracking of the whips of
other guards.
‘This all started in Nazi Germany,’ Wilson explained. ‘Contrary to popular belief,
the Antarctic continent has many unexplored, ice-free areas, many of which are well
hidden from view by vast ice sheets and mountains. In other words, Dr King, we are
not quite underground, though we’re hidden by high mountain peaks. We’re carving
the rest of the space we need from the interior of the same mountain.’
Gradually accepting that all of this was real, Dr King was glancing about him, with
awe as well as fear, at the many unfortunates slaving in this dust-filled, arc-lit, rocky
hell.
‘Nazi Germany,’ Wilson continued, ‘had a genius for the construction of immense
underground production plants and factories, most completed with the ruthless use of
captured slave labour. Indeed, most of the underground research centres of Nazi
Germany were gigantic feats of construction, containing air-shafts, wind-tunnels,
machine-shops, assembly plants, launching pads, supply dumps, accommodation for
all who worked there, and adjoining camps for the slave workers - yet few German
civilians knew that they existed.’
A whip cracked and someone screamed. Dr King twitched but walked on, though
Clarke, growing ever more terrified, released an audible groan.
‘Take Peenemünde, for instance. The full enormity of that research complex

can
only be gauged from the fact that apart from its wind tunnel - the most advanced in
the world, containing its own research department, instrumentation laboratory,
workshops and design office - it also had its own power station, docks, oxygen plant,
airfield, POW camp for specially selected prisoners who provided cheap labour, and
social and medical facilities associated with a town of 20,000 inhabitants. It was
therefore the prototype for the even larger underground factories to be built secretly in Germany and Austria, notably at Nordhausen in the southern Harz mountain range of Thuringia, which is where I created my first piloted flying saucer, the *Kugelblitz*.

Do you know about Nordhausen, Dr King?'

'No, I'm afraid not.'

'It was an immense rocket research and construction facility, consisting of a series
of linked tunnels carved out of the Kohnstein Mountain, near the town of Nordhausen. The parallel tunnels were 1,800 metres long. Leading off them were
fifty side-chambers, a main work area of 125,000 square metres, and twelve ventilation shafts that had been bored down from the peak of the mountain. Work at
converting the tunnels into a mass-production facility for rockets began in September
1943 with the use of 2,000 engineers and 15,000 inmates from the nearby concentration camps. The slaves were kept in a separate camp located in a hidden
mountain valley, less than a kilometre from the entrance to the tunnel. A new underground complex, to be linked to Nordhausen by another network of tunnels,
was in the process of being built sixteen kilometres under the ground around the town
of Bleicherode, twenty kilometres distance. Between them, Nordhausen and Bleicherode constituted the first of the SS underground factories - virtually

living
towns - and what the Nazis were doing there, under the earth, we are now doing here,
in the Antarctic.’
‘I can’t imagine how you managed to get so much equipment and so many of these
unfortunate wretches here,’ King said, glancing around him at the sobbing, sweating
captives now slaving in abominable conditions.
‘The labour force and equipment were shipped in submarines, in the course of
many voyages, over a period of years, throughout the war, when other Nazi boats and
submarines were protecting the South Atlantic coastline of Antarctica. Bear in mind
that the normal U-boat of that time could cover 7,000 miles on each operational
cruise. Also, the Germans had submarine tankers spread across the South Atlantic
Ocean at least as far as south of South Africa, and any one of those tankers, which
had a displacement of 2,000 tons, could supply ten U-boats with fuel and stores, thus
trebling the time that those submarines could stay at sea. It took a long time, but we
managed to get enough men and equipment here before the war ended. We should
have enough to last a couple more years, by which time we will have more and bigger
saucers to fly in what we need.’
The tunnel led into another large viewing bay in which the plate-glass windows
had yet to be inserted. Far below was a workshop of massive dimensions, with jibs
and cranes, whining machines, and sheets of a metallic substance, dull grey and
different shapes, being swung to and fro. There were many workers down

there, also,
as well as long work benches, steaming vats, blast furnaces, screeching electric drills,
and the ribbed bodywork for other, larger saucers. The walls of the workshop were
solid rock, hacked out of the mountain's interior, but the vast ceiling was reinforced
concrete, as was the floor.
‘The workshop’s 300 feet long and 138 feet wide,’ Wilson explained. ‘Its roof is eighty feet high and made from twenty-three-feet thick reinforced concrete. To pierce it, you’d need a bomb weighing about twelve tons and striking the ceiling at a speed of Mach 1, the speed of sound. In order to construct it, we needed 49,000 tons of steel and concrete for the roof alone. Hundreds of jacks were used to raise the roof slowly, inches at a time, with the walls being built up beneath it, as it was raised. The enormous amounts of steel, cement, sand and gravel needed were brought in by Uboat and airplane over a period of years, like the rest of the material and the labour force. The site used about 5,000 workers, who were shipped here from the occupied territories, mostly from concentration camps. At any one time there were always at least a thousand men at work. This went on around the clock in twelve-hour shifts, and my guards had no hesitation in executing anyone too ill or exhausted to do it. For this reason, we managed to complete the construction of the workshop in a year. With
logic, Dr King, and not emotions, men can do the impossible.’
Dr King gazed down on the skeletal saucer prototypes and the great steel plates
being swung to and fro. ‘So it was one of your flying saucers that crashed at Socorro,
New Mexico.’
‘No,’ Wilson said. ‘Not one of ours.’
King started to respond, obviously wanting to know about the other saucer, but
before he could do so Wilson waved him into silence and led him and the others
across a catwalk, through another, shorter tunnel, eventually entering a steel-plated
room which had rows of frosted glass cabinets on the shelves and naked,

dead bodies
inside them.
Clarke stopped walking when he saw the bodies, letting out another groan, but the
dark-eyed Artur Nebe, who still had his hand on his pistol, roughly pushed him
onward. Dr King merely gave a slight shudder, but continued walking behind Wilson.
They soon emerged from the tunnel to another room, a laboratory, its steel-plated
walls climbing to a ceiling of chiselled rock that was part of the interior of the
mountain.
Here, the members of staff looked perfectly normal, men and women in white
smocks, reading and writing, peering down through microscopes, checking printouts,
gauges and thermometers, working quietly, intently. More appalling, however, were
the specimens in the cages and glass jars: human heads, artificially pumping hearts,
floating brains and intestines. There were also cabinets containing artificial joints and
various prosthetics.
‘Oh, Jesus!’ Clarke groaned. He covered his face with his hands, started shaking
even more, and became so weak that he had to be propped up by Ernst Stoll. Clarke
started sobbing again.
‘Take him away,’ Wilson said. ‘Might as well prepare him immediately. Stoll,
come and see me in five minutes. I’ll be in my office.’
‘Yes, sir,’ Stoll said. He and Kammler then slipped their arms around Clarke and
practically carried him out of the laboratory, leaving only the dark-eyed,
expressionless Artur Nebe with Wilson and Dr King. The latter was gazing around him in amazement, but not shock, as prosthetics were what he had

been working on in
the hospital in England.
‘A familiar sight?’ Wilson asked, pleased to see that Dr King was in control of
himself.
‘The prosthetics, yes. The rest of it, no. We work under certain moral restraints, as
you’ve already noted.’
Wilson smiled thinly. ‘The work that goes on here,’ he explained, ‘is not only for
the production of advanced prosthetics and organs. Its ultimate goal is life extension,
first through the transfer and replacement of bodily parts, eventually by discovering
the secrets of longevity. Right now, we need primitive life extension through
prosthetic replacement, which is where you come in. Your work will involve human
prosthetics and the creation of cyborgs: half man, half machine. I’m sure you’ll find
it highly satisfying.’
‘You realise I think you’re insane.’
‘I’m not. I’m just logical.’
Dr King was not swayed by Wilson’s brand of logic. ‘I’m fifty years old. I have a
family and friends. Even were I to accept that I can’t escape from here, I’d still find it
psychologically impossible to adjust to the loss of everything I’ve known, loved and
need. In short, even if I tried to co-operate, I don’t think I’d succeed.’
‘You worry unnecessarily. We have ways of indoctrination. Drug therapy,
combined with psychological persuasion, will aid your adjustment while letting you
retain all your faculties. That process of indoctrination begins today.’ Dr King just
stared at him, blinking too much, turning pale. ‘Are you frightened?’ Wilson asked. ‘Yes, I’m very, very frightened.’
‘You won’t be for long.’

Wilson nodded at Artur Nebe, who removed his pistol from its holster and indicated the nearest doorway with it. Dr King licked his lips, then walked out, followed closely by Nebe. Wilson sighed, then stepped into another lift and ascended to the level directly above - the highest level so far, though others were planned. Emerging from the lift, he entered a sunlit, dome-shaped room, its white-metal walls gleaming, enormous windows running around the walls, framing the dazzling sky and snow-capped mountain peaks of the Antarctic wilderness. Between the windows were doors, steel-plated, all closed, computer consoles jutting out just above them, their lights flashing on and off. The room was fifty feet wide. There was a desk in the middle. On the desk was an intercom, a microfilm viewer, a pile of books, notepaper, pens and pencils, a panel of switches. There were chairs in front of the desk, all leather, deep and comfortable; there was no other furniture in the room. The floor was laid with plain tiles which, in combination with the steel-plated walls, made the room cold and sterile.

Wilson walked across the floor, his footsteps reverberating, passing the desk and stopping at the window, to look out over his kingdom of snow and ice, the impossibly blue sky. He only turned away from that view when the door opened and Ernst Stoll entered. Stoll stopped by the chairs at the desk, but he didn't sit down. 'You wanted to see me, sir?'

'Yes.' Wilson remained at the window, gazing steadily at Stoll, aware that he wouldn't like what he was about to hear. Stoll was in his middle thirties, but looked older, no longer handsome, ravaged by the loss of his family and idealism

during the
war. Now loathing the outer world, having nothing to return to, he was devoted to
Wilson and his work with this Antarctic colony. He would not want to leave.
‘The colony is expanding rapidly and requires more workers,’ Wilson said. ‘The
original labour force is dying off and for that reason, also, we need more workers. We
also need human specimens for our laboratory experiments. Finally, we need smaller
people for use in the saucers, either in human form or, given time, as cyborgs. We can
find a plentiful, constant supply of the small Ache Indians of Paraguay. That country
remains sympathetic to the Nazis and will welcome your overtures.’
‘I’m to go to Paraguay?’
‘More than that, Ernst. Not for a mere trip. You must give up direct participation in
the running of this colony and instead take up residence in Paraguay. There you will
cultivate a close relationship with General Stroessner, organise the purchase,
collection and shipment of the Ache Indians, and keep constantly vigilant for signs of
betrayal by Stroessner or his government. In other words, you will leave here for
good and settle in Paraguay.’
Stoll was dismayed. ‘I don’t want to leave here, sir, and I certainly don’t want to
settle in Paraguay. While it’s true that the country has become a haven for Nazi
refugees, most of them live in protected enclosures in the jungle and go mad with
boredom.’
‘You won’t be bored, Ernst. I promise you that. You’ll be busy rounding up Ache
Indians and liasing between the Paraguayans and me. You’ll be in frequent contact

with us here; and will receive regular visits from myself and others. You'll also be
our main contact with the rest of the world, which will include a lot of travelling and
meetings. So I'm certain that you'll find it far from dull and might even enjoy it. This
work is important, Ernst.'
'I'd rather stay here, but if you insist...'
'I insist. I don't trust anyone else, Ernst. Kammler and Nebe are men who like
intrigues and live by betrayal. I want them here, where I can keep my eyes on them.
You're the only one I'd trust outside the colony, so it has to be you.'
'I'm honoured,' Ernst said, as stupid about Wilson as he had been with Himmler
during the war. 'When do I leave?'
'Not immediately. Right now, that country is in the middle of a minor revolt, which
I believe will be defeated by President Morínigo. While this is going on, and causing
great confusion, we're having long and frustrating negotiations with that corrupt army
general, Alfredo Stroessner. We don't expect to have matters resolved too soon. I'd
think in six or seven months from now. Say early next year. Is that satisfactory?' 'Yes, of course.'
Wilson smiled thinly and shook his hand. 'Good, Ernst. I'm pleased.' Ernst nodded solemnly and left the office, having foolishly believed everything
Wilson had told him.
Yet what Wilson had told him was essentially correct - at least regarding the work
required. Where he had misled Ernst was in telling him that life in the jungles of
Paraguay would not be dull. In fact, it would be hell, which is why Wilson had
chosen Ernst. Kammler and Nebe would both have refused to go. Ernst, then, with his

perverted idealism, was the natural choice.
Pleased with himself, Wilson took the lift from his office back down to the third level. Once there, he made his way to the steel-plated laboratory with the ceiling of chiselled rock and gruesome collection of human heads, artificially pumping hearts, floating brains, intestines, and all kinds of prosthetics. Passing the men and women in white smocks, he entered the operating theatre, where the unfortunate Marlon Clarke, now almost mindless with terror, even though slightly sedated, was strapped by his legs, arms and forehead to a surgical bed and surrounded by silent, white-smocked surgeons.
'Oh, please,' Clarke whimpered tearfully. '*Please*!'
Wilson leaned over him, to smile coldly at him. 'We wish to remove your head while you're still fully aware, in order to check if we can preserve it in its conscious state. Your neck has been anaesthetised, so you shouldn't feel a thing, though you'll be aware until the very last moment of exactly what's happening. Treat it as an experience.'
He then stepped back to observe as the leading surgeon switched on the electric guillotine and moved it on its pulley into place over the throat of the pop-eyed, sweating, violently shaking Marlon Clarke. As the surgeon proceeded to surgically remove Clarke's head, Wilson calmly looked on, curious to see how the unfortunate man would react before death blotted out his mind.

Chapter Four

This place is the pits, Fuller decided as he parked his jalopy in front of the hospital annex in Fort Bliss, New Mexico, which was now being used to house the German rocket scientists under contract to the US Air Force. Fuller was an urban man who hated the country, and having driven the eighty miles from the White Sands Proving Ground, located between Alamogordo and the site of the first atomic explosion, across eighty miles of desert relieved only by endless sagebrush, he was convinced that he had passed through a world inhabited only by mountain lions, coyotes, wildcats, and rattlesnakes. He was therefore relieved to be in Fort Bliss, El Paso, within sight of the Organ Mountains (which, he had been informed, reminded the German scientists of the Bavarian Alps), though was *not* thrilled to step out of his car into more dust and scorching heat.

How he longed to be back in Langley, Virginia, with his CIA pals.

As he walked up to the door of Count Werner von Braun's rooms in the woodframe building, an Army Stinson L-5, a small liaison plane, flew overhead, reminding him that this was a military base and that the Kraut scientists housed here, including von Braun, were reportedly conducting, in collaboration with the Americans, a highly secret research project for the government.

Things sure change quickly, he thought with unsullied cynicism.

Ringing the doorbell located beside the mesh-wire screen, he reminded himself that the man he was about to meet was not an American, but a former Nazi scientist who had created the V-2 rocket that had devastated London and Antwerp during the war. Now classed as a civilian with civilian staff, von Braun remained in charge of 117 of his own German scientists, engineers and technicians, albeit under the supervision of US Army Major James P. Hammill, a physicist and German-speaking Fordham graduate. The Germans had come into America in 1945 as so-called Wards of the Army, thus requiring no entry permits, all signing one-year contracts with the Army. These were soon changed to five-year contracts, and now the Krauts, while still quartered in this hospital annex, were acquiring automobiles, wearing sombreros and cowboy boots, going to movies and night-clubs, and sending their kids to schools in El Paso.

A better life than we're having, Fuller thought as the front door opened and a wellfleshed, handsome face appeared behind the mesh-wire screen. Defeat has its rewards.

'Yes?' Count Werner von Braun asked.

‘Sam Fuller, from Langley, Virginia.’
‘Ah, yes, the CIA. You’re expected. Come in.’
He opened the mesh-wire door to let Fuller enter. Inside, the house, or conversion, was neat, if rather spartan and obviously not meant to last. Soon, as Fuller knew, von Braun would be moving to Redstone Arsenal, Huntsville, Alabama, as director of research-and-development projects of the Army Ordnance Guided Missile Centre.
Another reward, Fuller thought as he and the imposing German shook hands.
‘Please,’ von Braun said, indicating a soft chair in the living room. ‘Be seated.’ Fuller sat. ‘I’m afraid my wife isn’t here at present. A drink. Some tea? Lemonade?’
‘Beer?’
‘This I have,’ von Braun said, his great bulk looming large over Fuller, casting its shadow upon him. ‘One moment, please.’ When the German disappeared into the kitchen, Fuller had a good look around. No TV set yet, but the radio was on: Benny Goodman’s orchestra and a lady singing the swinging ‘Bei Mir Bist du Schön’, which made Fuller want to snap his fingers and dance. A copy of *Forever Amber* was on the table, in the shadow of a vase of fresh flowers. Clearly someone was perfecting his or her English with popular music and fiction. Von Braun soon returned with a tall glass filled with beer, which he gave to Fuller, and a bottle of Pepsi Cola for himself. ‘I am sorry it’s not German,’ he said. ‘American beer is not good, no?’
‘No,’ Fuller said. He sipped his lousy American beer. Von Braun sat in the sofa directly facing him, his thick legs outspread. He had the build of a wrestler and the ease that came with huge egos. He would not be pushed easily.
‘Nice place,’ Fuller said.
‘You know that’s not true. It is adequate, but better than we deserve - and, of course, temporary. I look forward to moving on.’
‘You like it in America? Apart from the beer, I mean?’
‘At first I was lonely. A lot of us, we were lonely. But recently we were joined by our parents, wives and children. Three hundred in all. Included in these were my parents, the Baron and Baroness Magnus von Braun - whose ancestral estate in Silesia has been confiscated by the Russians - and I have also been joined by my bride. I was given leave to marry her in Landshut and bring her back here. The Americans are generous.’

Damn right, Fuller thought. And an eighteen-year-old bride, a second cousin, at that. ‘We’re not so generous with our own citizens,’ he said without the trace of a smile.
Von Braun smiled for him, though his gaze remained cool. ‘No, I suppose not.’
‘Where’s your wife now?’ Fuller asked.
‘I thought our conversation would bore her,’ von Braun said, ‘so I sent her out for a walk.’
Which means she can’t say the wrong thing, Fuller thought. Some fat pumpkin we have here.
He sipped some more beer. His throat felt dry in this dusty hole. ‘What do you most like about America, Count von Braun?’
‘American sport. Joe DeMaggio and Rocky Graziano.’ Von Braun shrugged. ‘Apart from that, I only like my work. Now what do you want to know, Mr Fuller?’ Fuller smiled, admiring von Braun’s bluntness. A 28-year old hard case from Brooklyn, New York, Fuller was the child of moderately wealthy, uncaring parents, a clear-eyed product of Harvard, and a veteran of many relationships and one failed, childless marriage. Not a man for finer feelings, he admired those who were nimble on their feet and ruthless in pursuit of what they wanted. This von Braun, though built like a wrestler, clearly had those attributes.
‘I’ve come to enquire about your rocket construction programme. The V-1 and V2.’
Von Braun sighed. ‘I’ve been over this so many times. There is nothing secret about it anymore. It is all in the files.’
‘It’s easier for me to talk to you than try to get at the classified files. I have clearance for this, but not for your records. That’s why I’m here.’
Von Braun sighed again, sipped some Pepsi Cola, then rested the dripping bottle on his lap. ‘So what do you want to know?’
‘You were, I believe, one of the founder members of the German amateur rocket society, also known as the Spaceship Travel Club.’
‘Yes. The *Verein für Raumschiffart,* or VfR. It came into being in 1927 when a group of space-travel enthusiasts took over an abandoned three-hundred-acre arsenal, which they called their *Raketenflugplatz,* or Rocket Flight Place, in the Berlin suburb of Reindickerdorf. From there they actually shot some crude, liquid-fuelled rockets skywards.’
‘When did you join it?’

‘About 1930, as I recall. By then the VfR included most of the rocket experts of the day, including Rudolf Nebel, Hermann Oberth, Willy Ley, Max Valier, and Klaus Riedel. I was very proud to gain admittance to that august company.’
‘How did you end up in the German army?’
‘I know what you’re implying, but it’s not true,’ von Braun said with no sign of anger. ‘I was never a Nazi. In April 1930, the Ordnance Branch of the German Army’s Ballistics and Weapons Office, headed by General Becker, appointed Captain Walter Dornberger to work on rocket development at the army’s Kummersdorf firing range, approximately fifteen miles south of Berlin. Two years later, after many experiments to find the most promising method of propulsion and the most stable means of flight, the VfR demonstrated one of their liquid-fuelled rockets to Dornberger and other officers at Kummersdorf. In 1933, when Hitler came to power, the VfR was taken over by the Nazis and become part of the Kummersdorf programme. Many of the German engineers, including myself, were therefore conscripted in a very real sense. We were, and remain, scientists - not soldiers.’
‘You ended up in Peenemünde, working on the V-1 rocket programme.’
‘Yes, but the prototype was known as the A-2.’
‘Is it true that much of the German rocket research was based on the work of the American rocket scientist, Robert H.Goddard?’
‘A genius shamefully ignored by his own country. Yes, it’s true. We all revered Goddard and based our work on his brilliant theories. While in the United States those theories were being received with indifference and even contempt, we in Hitler’s Germany was spending fortunes on rocket research that was, by and large, based on Goddard’s work. As early as December, 1934, two highly advanced A-2 rockets, constructed at Kummersdorf, gyroscopically controlled, and powered by oxygen-and-alcohol fuelled motors, were launched from the island of Borkum in the North Sea and reached an altitude of one-and-a-half miles. Those stabilised, liquidfuelled rockets were, at the time, the only known, serious challengers to the rockets of Robert H.Goddard.’
‘But the work didn’t end there.’
‘No. In March 1936 we demonstrated some more motors at Kummersdorf, including one with an unprecedented 3,500 pounds of thrust. Those demonstrations so impressed the German Commander-in-Chief, General Fritsch, that permission was given for us to build an independent rocket

establishment in a suitably remote part of Germany, where research and test firings could be carried out in the strictest secrecy. The chosen site was near the village of Peenemünde, on the island of Usedom, off the Baltic coast. The rest is now history.'

'According to an Operation Paperclip report, when the V-2 rockets were inspected by Allied scientists in the captured Nordhausen Central Works at the close of the war, they were found to be remarkably similar to the rockets of Robert H.Goddard.'

'Of course. The most notable features of the propulsion unit were the shutter-type valves in the fixed grill, the fuel injection orifices incorporated in the same grill, the combustion chamber, spark plugs and nozzle. We stole those from a Robert H. Goddard patent that was reproduced in the German aviation magazine, *Flugsport* - in January 1939, as I recall.'

'In 1944 many Allied pilots were being harassed by what appeared to be balls of fire which were under some kind of remote control. The pilots called them "Foo Fighters". Were they connected in any way with your work or Goddard's early experiments?'

'No, I don't believe so. I had heard that they were some new kind of German secret weapon, radio-controlled from the ground, and designed either to foul the ignition systems of the bombers or act as pyschological weapons, to confuse and unnerve Allied pilots. Certainly they were not designed or constructed at Peenemünde. However, given that they might have utilised some of our technical innovations, it's possible they were created by rocket engineers other than my own.'

'Such as?'

Von Braun shrugged. 'We were scattered far and wide.'

'What about Kummersdorf or Peenemünde?'

'Not at the latter; possibly at the former. There were actually two rocket research centres at Kummersdorf, separated by an old firing range. We were transferred from the original site to the new site at the other side of the firing range, then another development team took over our old site.'

'Anything unusual about it?'

Von Braun smiled knowingly. 'You mean the reports about a traitorous American physicist?'

'Wilson. You know about him?'

'Not much,' von Braun said, shaking his head. 'I never met him or saw him. I only heard reports about his extraordinary presence as part of a research

team involved in a top-secret project. I never found out what the project was, but certainly ideas and innovations were swapped across the firing range. The other establishment was even more heavily guarded than ours.'
'Do you think Wilson had anything to do with the so-called Foo fighters?'
'There were rumours about disc-shaped aircraft. Frightened whispers. No more than that. Certainly nothing of that nature was tested while I was at Kummersdorf.'
'Do you believe disc-shaped aircraft were on the German agenda?'
'Yes. I myself didn't believe that such a craft could be made workable - I believed in rockets, not flying discs - but certainly Germany has a long history of research into vertical-rising, spherical or disc-shaped aircraft. In fact, the idea itself was first conceived by a German: the 19th century mathematician and aeronautical theorist Wilhelm Zachariae.'
'A theorist,' Fuller said impatiently, now listening, also, to the Glen Miller orchestra on the radio and wondering what had caused the famous band leader's unexplained disappearance over the Atlantic. 'Were his ideas ever put into practice?'
'Yes. As early as 1939 Dr. Alexander Lippisch, at Messerschmitt, Augsburg, was developing his Delta-Rocket Jet ME 163 and testing its circular wing in the wind tunnel of the AVA company at Göttingen. Meanwhile, Arthur Sack, of Machern, near Leipzig, had for years been obsessed with the idea of disk-shaped aircraft. He tested various models at the model-airplane competition at Leipzig-Mockau in July 1939, with disastrous results. A larger, piloted model, the AS 6, was constructed at the Mitteldeutsche Motorenwerke factory in Leipzig and failed to fly during its test flight at the beginning of February, 1944, on the airfield at Brandis, near Leipzig. He tried again at Brandis in April 1944, but the airplane barely lifted off the ground. Shortly after, the Allied advance brought Sack's experimentation to a halt for all time.'
'Any more?'
Von Braun sighed, obviously finding the subject tiresome. 'Not much. Viktor Schauberger claimed to have designed and constructed a small, remote-controlled flying saucer in 1940 in the Kertl aircraft company in Vienna. Reportedly, during a test conducted three years later, the saucer went through the ceiling, but by and large it was otherwise unworkable - like most of the other prototypes. Then there were the so-called flying wings, or all-wing airframes, of the Horten brothers, which excited the interest of your

intelligence, but which in fact were of value purely for research into wind velocity and drag. Finally, as you doubtless know, by the closing months of the war there were many rumours in German aeronautical circles about the imminent appearance of radically different airplanes, without wings, tails, rudders or other surface protruberances, and powered by special turbines or jet engines. I think it unlikely that such projects were completed - if indeed they ever existed in the first place.'
'Which gets us back to the rockets.'
'I'm afraid so,' Von Braun said.
'What about Nordhausen, towards the end of the war? Were there other rocket engineers in that area?'
'You mean Wilson again.' Von Braun was sourly amused by Fuller's interest. 'More rumours,' he said. 'We heard that another group, heavily guarded by Artur Nebe's most ruthless SS troops, had been shipped in from Kummersdorf to Kahla, which was not very far from Nordhausen. There were also rumours that a jetpropelled aircraft of unusual configuration, but possibly spherical or disc-shaped, had been test-flown over Kahla in February 1945. The results of that test, if indeed it took place, were not known, but in early April the Kahla complex was evacuated, as was Nordhausen, and that was the last I heard of Wilson.'
Fuller knew the rest. At the end of the war, Germany's scientific papers were hidden, and eventually found, in tunnels, caves, dry wells, ploughed fields, river beds and even dried-out cess pools. Also found across the length and breadth of Nazi Germany and its occupied territories were the well known V-1 flying bombs and V-2 rockets, as well as lesser known, but equally formidable, heat-guided ground-to-air missiles, sonic-guidance torpedoes, the highly advanced U-XX1 and U-XXIII electrical submarines, ME-262 jet-fighters, rocket planes that flew even faster than the Messerschmitts, the beginnings of an Atom Bomb project, and the prototypes for other, vertical-rising jet aircraft. Because of this, there was a race between the Allies and the Russians to capture as many of the rocket scientists and engineers as possible, as well as the invaluable technical documentation. Deals were thus struck between the conquerors and their former enemies, particularly with regard to those involved in rocketry and other advanced weaponry.
Along with 150 of their best men, General Dorberger, Walther Riedel, and Werner von Braun came to the United States to work on secret government projects. The Russians, however, also gained a wealth of documentation and

material, including the V-2 rockets, buzz bombs, ocean-spanning surface-to-surface and surface-to air missiles found in Peenemünde; about seventy percent of the 12,000 tons of technical equipment stranded on the docks at Lübeck, Magdeburg, and the Gotha plant. They also captured 6,000 German technical specialists, including Dr Bock, Director of the German Institute of Airways Research; Dr Helmut Gröttrup, the electronics and guided-missile expert; and a particular aeronautical engineer, known only as 'Habermohl' and reported to have worked under the American, Wilson.

'Why are you so interested in this Wilson?' von Braun asked while glancing impatiently at his wristwatch. 'Has he vanished completely?'

'Yes.'

'He was probably killed by the Nazis.'

'That's what was reported, but we don't think it's true. We have reason to believe that Wilson, when in Nazi Germany, was indeed working on highly advanced, supersonic aircraft of unusual configuration, possibly spherical or disc-shaped, and that he might still be doing so in a location I'm not allowed to disclose.'

'You mean the Soviet Union? The V-2 they launched recently?'

'No. Somewhere else. I can't say where it was. But I *can* tell you that my government is seriously concerned with what Wilson might be constructing at the present time. Which is why we were so keen to place you and your rocket scientists under contract, irrespective of negative public opinion.'

'I'm not sure I get your drift.' Von Braun's command of English was admirable, as was his gift for casually easing people out of his house. He simply sighed, glanced again at his wristwatch, then stood up and stretched himself, which made him look even bigger than he was. 'But I'm sure you know what you're about,' he added. 'Your intelligence is thorough.'

Fuller stood up as well, then walked to the front door. Von Braun, acting as if he had been shaken out of a trance, said, 'Oh, I see you're leaving! Please, let me.' He held the door open until Fuller had stepped outside and turned back to face him. 'So why did you risk negative public opinion to put me and my men under government contracts?'

'It's imperative,' Fuller said, 'that we get into space before Wilson does. Do you think you can do that?'

'Chuck Yeager has already broken the sound barrier,' von Braun said. 'So the answer to your question is "Yes".'

‘Good,’ Fuller said, then he nodded goodbye, walked down to the car, climbed in and drove out of Fort Bliss.

Chapter Five

Nichola Randall, already blonde and beautiful, was covered in mushy food and hammering the rim of her high chair with a rattle as if beating on a tin drum. At least that’s what it sounded like to her dad, Captain Dwight Randall, who winced as he ate his Cornflakes, even though he could not be angry with her, not even this early in a bleak morning in January, 1948.

‘Honey,’ he said, ‘I know you’re just seven months old, but couldn’t you quieten it down just a little bit? Between you and those damned airplanes taking off, I can hardly think straight.’

‘Don’t blame my daughter,’ Beth said. ‘Blame the US Air Force and their planes.

Always making a racket.’

‘*Your* daughter, I note,’ Dwight said with a grin. ‘I don’t get a look-in. You’d think

I’d nothing to do with her.’

‘Stop fishing for compliments.’

‘As for the US Air Force, don’t forget it’s our bread and butter. Here we are in a

tract house in Dayton, Ohio, secure as little bunnies in their burrows. What more

could we ask for?’

‘A house outside Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. A little home of our own.’ ‘Time will bring us everything.’ Dwight finished his Cornflakes and pushed his

plate aside as another F-51 jet interceptor roared overhead. Nichola gurgled happily

in her high chair, banging away with the rattle and smearing food over her face, but

Beth rolled her eyes as if she couldn’t bear it another minute. Still as slim as an

adolescent in loose sweater and slacks, she had short-cropped auburn hair and the

face of a lovely urchin, full-lipped and round-cheeked. They had only been married a

year and were still in love, Dwight hoped, but Beth was increasingly

frustrated by life on the base and by Dwight's heavy workload with the ATIC, the Air Technical Intelligence Centre, located here in Wright-Patterson AFB. If anything, his workload had become even heavier since the start of the UFO flap, last year. In the seven months since then, he had virtually worked around the clock and it was giving them problems. Now Beth, ironing the clothes by the window, was looking disgruntled. 'When are you going to get a few days off?' she asked.

'Soon.'

'You've been saying that for months.'

'Our new boss is arriving this morning, so I can't ask immediately, but as soon as he's settled in, I'll put in my request for some leave.'

'Promise?'

'I promise.'

The telephone rang. Carrying his cup of coffee, Dwight leaned across the table, kissed Nichola on her messy cheek, then picked up the phone.

'Captain Randall,' he said.

'Hi, Dwight, it's Bob,' said his friend and sidekick at the ATIC, Captain Robert Jackson. 'Are you awake yet?'

'I'm just about to leave.'

'I'm at the office already.'

'Bully for you.'

'I'm gonna make your day, Cap'n.'

'Oh, how?'

'We've just received a classified Memorandum for the Record from our Commanding General. It states that last September General Nathan Twining, Chief of Staff of the United States Army, wrote to Brigadier General George Schulgen, Commanding General of the Army Air Force, expressing his belief that the UFO

phenomenon is something real, that it is not, quote, visionary or fictitious, unquote,
and that the objects are disc-shaped, as large as aircraft and... wait for it... *controlled*.' Dwight whooped with delight, making Beth stare at him, surprised. He couldn't
contain himself because for too long he had been working on a project that many
thought was a waste of time, if not downright idiotic. Twining's letter would give the
project validation, as well as priority, and Dwight felt good about that. He therefore
grinned like a schoolboy and gave a puzzled Beth the thumbs-up.
'According to the memo,' Bob continued, 'the letter wasn't intended to support the
extraterrestrial hypothesis, but came about because US military fears that the UFOs
might be Russian have been exacerbated by the knowledge that the Soviets tested
their first A-bomb last November.'
'Right,' Dwight said. 'I *thought* that might get them jumping.'
Bob chuckled. 'Anyway, because of Twining's letter, the Army Air Force is going
to establish an official UFO investigation unit with a 2A classification. Called Project
Sign, it'll be located right here, in Wright-Patterson, with you in charge and me
remaining as your sidekick. We're to start it as soon as we can, but no later than next
month, so you better get your ass over here, Cap'n.'
'I'm on my way,' Dwight said. Exultant, he hung up the phone, gulped the rest of
the coffee, put the mug back on the table and tightened his tie. As he slipped on his
jacket and reached for his peaked cap, he saw Beth's sulky face.
'Whoops!' he softly exclaimed.
'What's up?' Beth asked. When he told her, she said, 'There goes our vacation. A

2A classification is second only to top priority. You'll be working night and day with
this new project. I'll hardly see you at all.'
'I won't, I promise.' He placed his peaked cap on his head.
'Send me a postcard,' Beth replied. 'Let me know how you're keeping.' Dwight smiled uneasily, then gave her a hug and kissed her. 'Don't worry, I'll be
back in time for dinner. Have a good day.'
'Yeah,' Beth said flatly.
She was already returning to her ironing when he left the house and walked quickly, too eagerly, to the ATIC offices, located at Wright Field. Saluting junior and senior officers en route, he looked fondly at the aircraft flying overhead, under grey clouds being pierced by weak sunlight. Recalling Beth's sulky face, he was ashamed of his own eagerness, but knew that it could not be helped. The truth of the matter was that he was too easily bored and, though still loving Beth, was having problems
adjusting to the domesticity of marriage and fatherhood.
During the Second World War he had been a B-29 bombardier and radar operator,
flying to India, China and the Pacific with the original B-29 wing. Though returning
to college after the war, he had kept his reserved status, flying as a navigator in an Air
Force Reserve Troop Carrier Wing. This had only increased his low-boredom
threshold for normal life, so immediately upon receiving his degree in aeronautical
engineering, he married Beth, whom he had met at college, then went back on active
duty. He was posted straight to the ATIC, which was responsible for keeping track of
all foreign aircraft and guided missiles, and he and Beth moved into married quarters
here at Wright-Patterson.
Beth was the beloved only daughter of Joe McGinnis, an amiable car salesman and
his good-humoured wife, Glenda, both Dayton residents. Their benevolent

parenthood had turned Beth into a fine woman, a loving, loveable wife, but one not familiar with life on an air base. They had been here for a year now. During that time, Nichola had been born, but Beth was increasingly desperate to kick off the shackles of Air Force protocol and be nearer her parents in Dayton.

Like Mr and Mrs McGinnis, Beth was good-humoured and quick-tempered, which had made for some tempestuous moments when the first small, inevitable disillusionments of marriage were setting in. Unfortunately, Dwight's growing fascination with the UFO phenomenon, which he found more intriguing than the tracking of foreign aircraft and guided missiles, had revitalised his flagging interest in the peacetime air force, even as it increased Beth's frustrations by keeping him away from home more often. Trouble was brewing, he realised, and he didn't know how to deal with it.

His sidekick, Air Force Captain Bob Jackson, was in the operations room of the ATIC with their only assistant, a pretty blonde WAC corporal, Thelma Wheeler, from Huntsville, Alabama. Bob, in his late twenties like Dwight, was a recruiting officer's dream in his Air Force uniform, with short-cropped dark hair, a sleekly handsome face, and a ready smile that always made Thelma squirm with pleasure. When Dwight entered, Bob was sitting on the edge of the WAC's desk, obviously flirting with her while leafing through the morning's mail, but he looked up and grinned when he saw Dwight.

'Lo!' he said. 'Our supervisor has arrived! I *thought* that phone call would

get you
of bed.’
‘I *was* already out of bed.’
‘Tell it to the marines.’
Thelma touched her piled-up hair with exploratory fingers and asked, ‘Would you
two like a cup of coffee?’
‘Yes, thanks,’ they replied in unison.
Thelma pushed her chair back, stood up, and went into the small kitchen, looking
attractive at this hour of the morning in her standard WAC skirt and blouse. Dwight
thought there was something going on between her and Bob, but he couldn’t be sure
of it. Right now, Bob was removing his admiring eyes from the door through which
Thelma had disappeared and instead casting a more thoughtful gaze around the one
room that constituted the operational centre of the ATIC.
It was a spartan office, with a few desks, lots of filing cabinets, typewriters, phones
and a mountain of paperwork, most of it technical information sheets for official UFO
reports. The walls were covered with incident maps, charts and graphs showing most
of the reported UFO sightings, including the Foo fighters of World War II, the
Scandinavian sightings of 1946, and the wave of American sightings that had started
with the two famous incidents in Washington State in July the previous year.
So far, the coloured pins on the maps revealed no definite, or linking pattern, to the
flight paths of the reported UFOs, apart from a general northerly direction of retreat.
It wasn’t much to go on.
Grinning, Bob lifted a couple of sheets off the desk and waved them at Dwight,

who immediately snatched them from him and started reading. The papers included a copy of General Twining's original official letter, dated September 23, 1947, to the Commanding General of the Army Air Force; another letter from Major-General L.C.Craigie, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Air Matériel Command, dated December 30, 1947, instructing the Commanding General of Wright-Patterson AFB to form a project, to be codenamed Sign and classified 2A, for the serious evaluation of UFO reports; and finally, a Memorandum for the Record from the Commanding General of Wright-Patterson to Dwight, ordering him to set up the project forthwith from his present office in Wright Field.

Reading the letters with increasing exhilaration, Dwight saw all the words he had longed to hear from his superiors: 'the phenomenon reported is something real... not visionary or fictitious... appear to be disc-shaped... as large as aircraft... controlled either manually, automatically or remotely... might be of foreign origin... possibly nuclear... collect, collate, evaluate and distribute all information... of concern to national security...' These words had finally come from the very top to cast the UFOs out of mythology and bring them into reality. Dwight was overwhelmed.

'Here's your coffee, Cap'n.'

Dwight looked up with a start. Thelma was smiling at him and holding out a cup of coffee. When he took it, she gave the other cup to Bob, who was grinning wickedly at him.

'Feels pretty good, right?'

‘Right.’
‘Christ, where do we start?’
‘Let’s go through all the reports.’
‘*All* of them?’ Thelma asked in dismay.
‘Yes, Thelma,’ Dwight confirmed, glancing sideways at her as she sat on the edge
of her desk, hitching up her skirt to reveal her perfect knees, and looked despairingly
at the thick files piled up on it. ‘*All* of them.’ He turned back to Bob. ‘Now, at last,
the top brass will be taking an interest, so we better make sure we’re prepared.’ ‘By isolating the major sightings from all the others and trying to find some pattern
in them.’
‘Exactly.’
‘You’re the boss,’ Bob said.
The day passed so quickly, they hardly knew it was fading. While Thelma fed
them on a constant diet of black coffee and, at lunchtime, sandwiches from the PX,
Dwight and Bob went through most of the files of UFO reports, or technical
information sheets, whittling out the weakest cases, selecting the strongest, and then
exchanging those selected and going through them again. By 5.30pm Thelma was
suggesting that it was time to finish work. By 6.30pm she was complaining that she
didn’t get paid overtime. An hour later she was pouring them more coffee and
insisting that she was going to miss dinner. At 8.00pm she was finally allowed to
leave, waving at Dwight as she did so, but smiling more meaningfully at Bob. By
9.00pm Dwight and Bob were facing each other over a mountain of reports and
through a haze of cigarette smoke, summarising what it was they had to go with. ‘Okay,’ Bob said, puffing smoke from yet another cigarette, but now

sipping
whisky instead of coffee, ‘the basic scenario is this... The UFO scare didn’t really
start last July. It appears to have started before it, during World War II...’ On December 13, 1944, Marshall Yarrow, then the Reuters special correspondent
to Supreme Headquarters in liberated Paris, syndicated an article stating that the
Germans had produced a secret device, thought to be an air defence weapon, which
resembled the glass balls used on Christmas trees. According to Yarrow, they were
coloured silver, seemed slightly transparent, and had been seen hanging in the air
over German territory, sometimes singly, sometimes in clusters. A second article by
another reporter, published in the New York *Herald Tribune* of January 2, 1945,
described the devices as ‘weird, mysterious “Foo fighter” balls’ that raced alongside
the wings of Beaufighters flying intruder missions over Germany. According to the
reports of Allied pilots, the ‘balls of fire’ would appear suddenly and accompany the
planes for miles. They seemed to be radio-controlled from the ground. ‘Either because of the famous line from the popular Smokey Stover comic strip,
“Where there’s foo, there’s fire”,’ Bob explained, reading from his notes, ‘or simply
because the French word for “fire” is *feu*, those eerie weapons soon became widely
known as “Foo fighters”.’
Official Foo fighter reports were submitted by pilots Henry Giblin and Walter
Cleary, who stated that on the night of September 27, 1944, they had been harassed in
the vicinity of Speyer by ‘an enormous burning light’ that was flying above

their
aircraft at about 250 miles per hour; then by Lieutenant Edward Schluter, a fighterpilot of the US 415th Night-Fighter Squadron based at Dijon, France, who, on the night of November 23, 1944, was harassed over the Rhine by ‘ten small reddish balls of fire’ flying in formation at immense speed. Further sightings were made by
members of the same squadron on November 27, December 22 and December 24. ‘In a report published in the New York *Times* of January 2, 1945, US Air Force
Lieutenant, Donald Meiers, claimed that there were three kinds of Foo fighter: red
balls of fire that appeared off the aircraft’s wingtips, other balls of fire that flew in
front of them, and “lights that appear in the distance - like a Christmas tree in the air -
and flicker on and off.” Meiers also confirmed that the Foo fighters climbed, descended or turned when the aircraft did so. The Foo fighters were witnessed both at
night and by day, yet even when pacing the Allied aircraft they didn’t show up on
radar screens.’
Allied intelligence was concerned enough about the reports to establish a classified
project in England, under the direction of Lieutenant General Massey, to examine
them. Massey was able to confirm that the Foo fighters were balls of fire that flew in
parallel formation with the Allied aircraft, often pacing them for great distances, at
speeds exceeding 300 miles an hour, frequently causing their engines to malfunction
by cutting in and out. While a few reports of crashing Allied aircraft suggest that Foo
fighters caused the crashes by making the aircraft’s engines cut out completely, most
reports indicate that this was unlikely: that the Foo fighters merely tailed the planes

and caused psychological harm, rather than physical damage. They also flew away
when fired upon.
‘But in the end, no official designation of the Foo fighters was given,’ Dwight said. ‘No,’ Bob confirmed. ‘Unable to solve the mystery, both the RAF and the US
Eighth Army Air Force concluded that they were the products of mass hallucination.
Subsequently, they did no more about them. In any event, sightings of the Foo
fighters tailed off and ceased completely a few weeks before the end of the war.’ ‘But the first post-war UFO flap came in 1946 with the appearance of so-called
“ghost rockets” over Scandinavia and western Europe: cigar-shaped, with flames
issuing from the tail, and mostly seen at night, often by airline pilots and radar
operatives.’
‘Which led to speculation that both the Soviets and the Americans, utilising the
men and material captured in the secret research plants of Nazi Germany, including
those at Peenemünde and Nordhausen, were developing advanced saucer-shaped
aircraft.’
‘That could have been possible,’ Dwight said. ‘Certainly, when World War Two
ended, the Germans had several radical types of new aircraft and guided missiles
under development. The majority of such projects were in their infancy, but they
were the only known craft that could even approach the performance of the objects
reported by UFO observers.’
‘Right,’ Bob said. ‘And it’s worth noting that whereas the mysterious Foo fighters
didn’t show up on radar, the ghost rockets certainly did - so they couldn’t be

classified as hoaxes, misidentifications or the products of mass hallucination.' 'The Soviets denied any knowledge of the rockets.'
'Sure, they did. But US suspicions remained unabated while those things continued
to fly. They only faded away the following year.'
'Then came the first known American sightings.' Dwight said, glancing down at
the notes he had taken from his own research. 'Pilot Richard Rankin's sighting of ten
discs, about thirty to thirty-five feet in diameter, over Bakersfield, California, on June
14, 1947; the Maury Island sighting of six larger discs by Harold Dahl on June 21,
1947 over Puget Sound, off Tacoma, Washington; and three days later, Kenneth
Arnold's famous sighting of nine disc-shaped, apparently metallic, objects flying in
formation and making an undulating motion, near Mount Rainier in the Cascades,
also in Washington. In the latter two cases the UFOs flew off and disappeared in the
direction of the Canadian border.'
'Thus strengthening the belief that they could be American secret weapons, also
based on captured German designs.'
'In other words, both the Soviets and the Americans could be producing secret
weapons, or aircraft, from designs and material captured during the war.'
'Which would lend credence to the reality of the original Foo fighter.'
'Right,' Dwight said. 'Then came last year's plague of UFO sightings over topsecret military bases.' He glanced down at his notes again. 'The first, on June 28, was
over Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. The next, on June 29, was
near Alamogordo, New Mexico, right over the White Sands Proving Ground. Finally,
on July 8, there was a whole spate of sightings of spherically shaped, white

aluminium-coloured objects flying over Muroc Air Base, the supersecret air force test
centre in the Mojave Desert.'
Bob nodded assent. 'And because those particular sightings were made by trained
technicians and pilots, and as the reported objects were appearing increasingly over
top-and-supersecret military research bases, a growing suspicion in intelligence
circles was that the men and material deported from Nazi Germany to Russia had led
to a dangerous Soviet lead in space technology.'
'Either them or extraterrestrials.'
'Yeah, right,' Bob said. 'Little green men.'
'Either way,' Dwight summarised, 'what we're dealing with is a combination of
small, fiery, probably remote-controlled discs and large, aircraft-sized, obviously
piloted, so-called flying saucers.'
'I guess so,' Bob said.
Dwight sighed, put his feet up on the desk, then lit yet another cigarette. 'It's now
probably too late to investigate the Maury Island and Kenneth Arnold sightings, but I
certainly think we should re-examine the ones that took place over our own military
establishments, particularly those at Muroc Air Base.'
'That may be easier said than done,' Bob pointed out. 'I reckon we'll have to be
careful. I mean, even though we've now been given official sanction to go ahead with
Project Sign, I don't think we should forget that a lot of the personnel involved in UFO sightings, either reporting them or investigating them, have got into hot water
with their superiors, often for no apparent good reason.'
'Yeah,' Dwight said thoughtfully. 'That's always baffled me. Given that UFOs

have been classified as a threat to national security, it's strange how much resistance
there's been to investigating them - particularly from our own intelligence services. I
mean, even that famous Socorro sighting of last year... Remember that?' Bob nodded
that he did, but Dwight went on anyway, talking, really, to himself. 'First the Roswell
Army Air Base public information officer, Lieutenant Walter Haunt, was
reprimanded and posted to some shit-hole for releasing the story to the press; then
First Lieutenant William Harris, the flight intelligence officer who helped me with
my investigations, went the same route. To that you can add the disturbing fact that
the major civilian witness to the actuality of the crashed saucer, local farmer Marlon
Clarke, has disappeared completely. Last but not least, the former, highly decorated,
OSS member and local UFO authority, Mike Bradley, refuses to even discuss the
matter, which suggests that he's pretty frightened of something - or *someone*. So, yes,
I think we've good reason to be concerned.'
'I don't wanna sound paranoid,' Bob said, pushing his chair back, placing his
hands on his hips and stretching his spine, 'but we've already had two officers killed
under suspicious circumstances while involved in UFO investigations. Only four
months ago. August 1, 1947. Captain William Davidson and Lieutenant Frank
Brown, both members of A-2 Military Intelligence of the Fourth Air Force. Engaged
in an investigation of Harold Dahl and the Maury Island mystery. They were flying
back to the Fourth Air Force, Hamilton Field, California, with a box

containing the
debris that had fallen from the damaged UFO into Puget Sound, when their B-25
malfunctioned and crashed, killing both of them. Even more surprising is that the
only other two passengers on board, Technician Fourth Grade Woodrow D.Mathews
and Master Sergeant Elmer L.Taff, neither experienced flyers, both of whom had,
reportedly, cadged a lift at the last moment, managed to parachute to safety while our
two highly trained intelligence officers failed to do so. That anomaly still hasn't been
explained.'
'You think it was rigged?'
Bob shrugged. 'All I know is that two experienced intelligence officers died - and
the only physical evidence for flying saucers we've had so far was lost in that crash.' Dwight shivered, feeling cold. He glanced out the window, saw that it was dark,
looked at his wristwatch and lowered his feet to the floor as if they'd been scorched.
'Shit!' he exclaimed. 'It's thirty after nine already! I should have been home for
dinner three hours ago. Beth's gonna kill me!'
'The joys of marriage,' Bob said, putting on his peaked cap and buttoning up his
jacket. 'I think I'll go and have a drink with a friend.'
'I hope it's not the delectable Thelma,' Dwight said, pushing his chair back, getting
to his feet, and likewise preparing to leave. 'A good officer doesn't get involved with
his staff, no matter how much he's tempted.'
'I think I get the message, Dwight.' Bob grinned and patted Dwight on the
shoulder, then they turned out the lights and left the office, locking the door behind
them. Once outside, Dwight looked across at the huge hangars, parked

planes and
silent airstrip of Wright Field, thinking of the other kinds of aircraft now haunting the
skies. Now, when he saw a shooting star, his heart gave a leap. It was almost instinctive.
‘Project Sign,’ he said. ‘It sounds good. I think I’ll enjoy it.’
‘You will,’ Bob replied, ‘but Beth won’t. Good night and good luck, my friend.’ ‘Tread carefully,’ Dwight said.
They walked off in opposite directions, Bob to have a drink, probably with Thelma
Wheeler, no matter what Dwight said, and Dwight to return and face the music for
being late to dinner again. As he headed away from Wright Field, the silence was
broken by the deep rumble of an RB-29 coming in to land, reminding him that the air
base never slept. Glancing up at the sky, which was a mosaic of cloudy patches and
stars, he contemplated the possibility of equipping some RB-29s with the latest aerial
cameras and using them to photograph unusual phenomena by day and by night. The
Air Matériel Command laboratories at Wright Field, he was convinced, would be
ideal for the processing of such photos. Determined to put his idea into immediate
practice, he turned into the silent streets of the married officers’s quarters, then
entered his temporary home.
As anticipated, Beth was not amused. Dwight’s meal was sitting untouched on the
table. Beth was reading a book, smoking a cigarette, and listening to Arthur Godfrey
on the radio at the same time. She did not look up when Dwight entered.
‘Sorry,’ he said. When she didn't reply, he crossed the room and kissed the top of
her head. ‘Really, I’m sorry.’

‘Your dinner’s cold.’
‘I noticed.’
‘Nichola’s in bed.’
‘I guessed.’
‘I didn’t get my postcard,’ Beth said, ‘and you seemed to be gone that long.’
‘Okay, Beth, that’s enough.’
‘Your work.’
‘Yes, my work. We have to set up this new project and we don’t have much time.’ ‘No time for us, obviously.’
‘That’s not an issue, Beth. I was only a ten-minute walk from here. It shouldn’t be
a big deal.’
Beth stubbed her cigarette out, closed her book, turned off the radio. Standing up,
she said, ‘Maybe not to you, but I know what it means.’
‘What?’
‘More UFO investigations. Even more than before. Since those first sightings, last
July, you’ve been travelling all over the place. Now that you’re in charge of the
whole thing, it’s bound to get worse.’ She headed for the bedroom, then turned back to face him. ‘And you like it,’ she accused. ‘That’s what maddens me the most. It’s not that you have to do it, it’s that you enjoy it so much. You’d rather be travelling and investigating UFOs than be at home with me and Nichola. I could hate you for
that.’
‘That isn’t true, Beth.’
‘It is. And damned well you know it. Goodnight, Dwight.’
‘Goodnight.’
When she disappeared into the bedroom, Dwight poured himself a stiff drink, neat
bourbon, and had it while sitting by the window, looking up at the night sky. He felt
guilty because he knew that Beth was right, so the drink went down well. He was just
finishing and contemplating bed when the telephone rang. It was Bob, sounding

shocked.
‘When I left you,’ he said, ‘I went back to the office – ’
‘What for?’ Dwight asked, realising instantly that the office was the only place on
the base where Bob and Thelma Wheeler could get together.
‘I forgot something... Anyway, what the hell’s the difference? What I’m saying is
that I was back in the office when I received a call from a buddy at Fort Knox,
Kentucky, informing me that Captain Thomas F. Mantell, an experienced pilot and
Air Force hero during the Normandy invasion, was killed in a crash today -
reportedly when trying to pursue a UFO over Godman Field.’
‘Oh, my God!’ Dwight blurted out, hardly able to believe his ears. ‘What made
them think it was a UFO?’
‘I don’t have the full facts yet. Godman have promised a detailed report, but in the
meantime all I’ve got is what I was told over the phone.’
‘Yes?’ Dwight demanded, feeling breathless.
‘There were a series of sightings this morning all over the area, beginning in
Maysville, Kentucky, less than a hundred miles east of Louisville, where Godman
AFB is located. The object was also sighted over Owensboro and Irvington, located
in northwest Kentucky. The cumulative sightings, called in to the local police,
indicated a circular, metallic object about 250 to 300 feet in diameter, heading in a
westerly direction, towards Godman Field. Early that afternoon, the state police
contacted Godman, but the control tower operators could confirm no similar sighting
at that time. However, half an hour later, the assistant tower operator picked up the
object, which was subsequently observed by the operations officer, the intelligence

officer, the base commander, his executive officer, and a band of other ranking
personnel.’
‘Christ!’ Dwight exclaimed.
‘A flight of four F-51 fighter planes, headed by Cap'n Mantell, was sent in pursuit
and was observed disappearing in the southward wake of the UFO. According to the
control-tower operators, by the time the four planes reached 10,000 feet, Mantell was
well ahead and far above them. He reported to the control tower: “I see something
above and ahead of me. It looks metallic and it’s tremendous in size. Now it’s starting to climb.” He then said that the UFO was above him, that he was gaining on it, and that he intended going as high as 20,000 feet. Those were his last words before he crashed. Losing contact with him, the other pilots returned to base, where they were
informed that Mantell was dead. The UFO wasn’t seen again.’
Bob went silent, though Dwight imagined he could hear him breathing heavily. He
then realised that he, too, was breathing heavily and that his heart was racing. Taking
a deep breath, he glanced up at the clouds and stars, then he let his breath out again. ‘Make sure you get the full report,’ he said.
‘Sure,’ Bob said. ‘Goodnight.’
The line went dead and Dwight put his phone down. He thought of Beth in their
bed, already concerned for him, and wanted to lie quietly beside her and press himself
into her. Instead, he poured himself another drink and let it last a long time. He drank
it while gazing up at the night sky, until it seemed to press down upon him,
threatening to crush him. That sensation, he knew, was caused by fear. He would
have to get used to that.

Chapter Six

‘They weren’t ours,’ Wilson said as he gazed out from his office of steel and concrete near the summit of the mountain to the vast, white desolation of Antarctica. ‘Neither the Maury Island sightings, nor those made by Kenneth Arnold over the Cascades, were of our saucers. The ones that flew back towards Canada belonged to someone else. Not to me. Not from here. We must look to America.’

He sipped his mineral water and placed his glass back on the table by the panoramic window. Hans Kammler, still blonde, handsome, and cold-eyed, gazed over Queen Maud Land, his beloved Neu Schwabenland, and smiled thinly, bleakly, to himself.

‘Ah, yes,’ he said, ‘the Americans. Perhaps the Soviets as well. Our captured V-2 rockets were shipped from Germany to New Mexico in 1945. The launch of American V-2s commenced at the White Sands Proving Ground in March the following year, under the direction of that traitor, Count von Braun. We have since received a report confirming that North American Aviation are planning to go into the production of rocket motors under a USAF contract and will be basing their work on the original V-2 motor.’

‘How ironic,’ Wilson said, smiling, ‘that the V-2 in turn was based on the rocket motors of America’s own, badly neglected Robert H. Goddard, with whom I also worked when he was located in Roswell, New Mexico, now the location of the White Sands Proving Ground. It has all come full circle.’

‘It’s nothing to be pleased about,’ Kammler said testily. ‘The Russians have Habermohl and the Americans have Miethe, who also worked on Projekt Saucer. Miethe was formerly stationed with von Braun at Fort Bliss, New Mexico, but is now located at Alamogordo, the centre of American rocket development. God knows what he’s constructing there.’

Wilson glanced at the launching pad far below, carpeted thinly with snow and shadowed by the encircling rock face soaring high above it. The Antarctic sunlight beamed down upon the latest 300-foot flying saucer like a torch shining into a dark well, making the machine’s metallic grey take on a silvery sheen. The many men in black coveralls, who had been swarming all over the saucer, were removing the ladders and hurrying behind the shock-proof protective shields located in small caves hacked out of the rock. From this high, behind the thick, plate-glass window, Wilson could not hear the saucer, but he could see it rocking slightly from side to side, its heat turning the thin snow into steam as it prepared for lift-off.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘the original Projekt Saucer team are a problem. Now that pompous fool, Schriever, who managed to escape from Prague, is living back in his hometown of BremerHaven, West Germany, telling all and sundry that the Allies are building flying saucers based on the one he constructed during the war. Though the press is viewing him with scepticism, he is in fact correct. The Canadians and Americans are both working on a flying-saucer development programme based on designs found in Germany at the end of the war. The Canadian project is being undertaken by the A.V. Roe Company in Malton, Ontario; the American one is hidden somewhere in the White Sands Proving Range, reportedly Holman AFB.’

Far below, the *Kugelblitz* Mark III lifted off the ground, swaying gently from side to side, then ascended silently, growing wider as it came up to Wilson’s level. The higher it climbed, the more sunlight it caught, which turned it from dull, almost invisible grey to dazzling silver.

It looks alien and beautiful, Wilson thought. Or beautifully alien. We have done a good job this time.

‘If their work is based on the Schriever designs, we have little to fear,’ Kammler said.

‘Not at the moment, but time could change that. Already the Americans and Canadians are more advanced than they should be. While grossly exaggerated versions of what Harold Dahl and Kenneth Arnold saw over the Cascades have enthralled the world, both men *did* in fact witness the test flights of a series of remote-controlled, pilotless discs, based on our original *Feuerball* and constructed at the A.V. Roe Company in Canada. A larger, piloted saucer is also being constructed there, as well as by a US Naval Laboratory team in that hidden location in the White Sands Proving Range. While reportedly neither machine is very good, both have had satisfactory test flights.’

‘Witnessed by various pilots and other trained military personnel,’ Kammler noted.

‘Yes. As have ours,’ Wilson said. ‘Which means that the US and Canadian saucers have been mistakenly credited with the kind of capabilities that only our machines possess so far. This, at least, is to the good. The Americans think the more efficient saucers have been made by the Russians, who believe that the Americans made them. Thus, we can fly our own saucers with impunity, not having to worry if we’re seen. By attempting to build their own saucers, based on our old designs, the Soviets, Americans and

Canadians have actually given us greater freedom of movement. They should get an award.'

His smile was not returned by Kammler, a man of limited humour, so he concentrated on the 300-foot saucer as it reached the level of the window and hovered there, swaying gently from side to side, as if in salute. In fact, it was just testing itself. The steel covers on the raised dome were open, revealing the transparent pilot's cabinet with six crew members inside, but they would close when the saucer actually took off on its long flight to Paraguay, making it look like a seamless spinning top in flight. Now, as if obeying Wilson's instinctive nod of approval, the saucer dropped out of sight below the window, descending back onto its landing pad.

'Is Stoll ready to leave?' Wilson asked.

'Yes,' Kammler replied. 'Not too happy, but prepared to do his duty. I better go down and say *Auf Wiedersehen.*'

'Tell him I'll be down before take-off, after I've visited the laboratory and talked to Dr King.'

'He responded well to his indoctrination. Particularly after hypnotic-drug treatment, which helped in changing his mind - for the rest of his life, I trust.'

'He's a man of considerable will power. He'll serve us well in the end. So, Hans, let's go.'

Pushing his chair back, Wilson glanced again across that vast, spectacular panorama of Antarctic wilderness, then stood and walked across the immense, domeshaped room, with Kammler behind him. They took the lift down to Level 3. Leaving Kammler in the lift, to continue his descent to ground level where the flying saucer was parked, Wilson walked through a short tunnel hacked out of the rock and entered the laboratory containing its ghoulish collection of human spare parts and artificial replacements. By now, some larger glass cabinets had been built into the walls of bare rock and contained drugged, unconscious, and frozen human beings who had been abducted by Wilson's flying saucer crews. Wired up to machines that showed their declining heartbeat and brain waves, they would eventually freeze to death, though not before providing valuable information for the ongoing researches into longevity.

Surrounded by other white-smocked physicians and surgeons, Dr King was at a long table, examining a drained human torso which had a prosthetic replacement attached to the stump of one of its amputated arms. The interior

of the prosthetic arm had been left open to reveal a complex of electric wiring that ran from the shoulder down into the artificial hand. A white-smocked assistant was applying electric charges to the prosthetic while Dr King checked the mobility of the twitching artificial fingers. He looked up and stopped what he was doing when Wilson approached him.

‘Good day, Wilson,’ he said, sounding calm enough, but not smiling.

‘Good day. How’s it going?’

King glanced down at the prosthetic arm fixed to the drained human torso. ‘Not bad,’ he said. ‘I think we’ll get there eventually. Working with human cadavers, instead of animals, short-circuits a lot of otherwise time-consuming experiments and aids progress tremendously. It’s really quite exciting. I think we’ll have working, myoelectric limbs before the year’s out. They won’t be all that good, but once we’ve got a working model, the rest of it will come even more quickly.’

‘What about head transplants?’ Wilson asked. ‘Or even partial replacement of the face and head: the mouth, throat and jawbone. I mean for the development of cyborgs. For survival in outer space and on the seabed. To man the saucers indefinitely.’

King glanced at the guillotined human head now frozen in a small glass case on a nearby table; it was wired up to an EEG machine recording weak, dying brain waves. The eyes of the head were open, staring wildly, seeing only God knows what. It was the head of the unfortunate Marlon Clarke.

‘A long way off yet,’ Dr King said, ‘but we’ll get there eventually. At the moment, we’re concentrating simultaneously on many different aspects of the problem and discovering the biological and physical interrelationships between them. Experiments already undertaken in the animal laboratory have convinced us that animal gut, intestines and even skin can eventually be transplanted successfully into humans. Similarly, the heart and lungs might be used, but this will take longer. Regarding artificial bones, joints and sockets, it’s my belief that the main alloys required will be of the cobalt and chromium variety: tantalum, titanium, niobium and molybdenum. Limited success has already been attained in the preservation of human heart valves, bone, blood and even the cornea of the eye.’

‘Very good,’ Wilson said. ‘Have you been able to make any advances on what you were doing in the Powered Limbs Unit of West Hendon hospital?’

‘Yes.’ The doctor spoke precisely, but rather like one of the automatons he was hoping to create. ‘In external prosthetics, the myoelectric control of

limbs is racing ahead.' He waved a hand, to indicate the prosthetic arm joined to the limbless human torso on the table. 'As you can see.' Wilson nodded. 'Already we've perfected a hand-arm prosthesis in which all five fingers are capable of closing around objects of variable shape, though not yet with the precision of a human hand. We're also working on other advanced prosthetics, including myoelectric arms with interchangeable hands. From there, I hope to progress to a more sophisticated myoelectric arm that will be able to move at any angle, speed or force simply by being *thought* into action. Such an arm will pick up muscle signals generated to the natural stump, transmit them to a small amplifier, and use that to drive a compact electric motor. The machinery for all of this will be housed inside a flesh-coloured, fibre-glass casing that resembles a real arm.'
'Like the one on the table.'
'Correct.'
'But the head,' Wilson insisted, glancing at the wide-eyed head of Marlon Clarke, which may or may not have been aware of its own existence, though it wasn't likely to be sane any more.
Ignoring the head, Dr King pointed at the large glass cases containing unconscious, frozen human beings. 'Our biochemists and mechanical, electrical, chemical, and biomedical engineers are already exploring the possibility of collecting healthy human specimens, rendering them unconscious, and freezing them to just under the point of death for as long as possible. If we can perfect a workable form of cryonic preservation, even though the brains of these living cadavers will have ceased functioning, they'll still be respiring, pulsating, evacuating, and excreting bodies that could be maintained for many years as a source of spare parts and for medical experimentation of all kinds.'
'But the head,' Wilson said impatiently, glancing at the staring eyes of Marlon Clarke. 'Can we ever transfer the entire head from one human being to another?'
King nodded affirmatively. 'I think it can be done. In the other laboratory isolated animal brains are being kept in cold storage and others, less lucky' - here the doctor smiled bleakly – 'are functioning, warm brains kept alive by hook-ups to blood machines or to live individuals of the same species. Right now we can't speculate as to what's going on mentally inside those disembodied brains, but our latest twoheaded dog has survived for a week now and is eating, sleeping and performing its physiological functions

normally, as if nothing has happened. In other words, it appears to accept itself as perfectly normal.'
'And longevity?'
'We'll require a steady supply of live foetuses. The heads will be cut off and then injected with radioactive compounds to enable us to study brain metabolism. We also need mature adults who can be injected with various diseases, including live hepatitis virus and cancer cells, to determine if the diseases can be so induced and suitable antidotes found.'
'We conducted similar experiments in the Nazi concentration camps,' Wilson informed him, 'but they didn't prove much.'
'You lacked knowledge and proper facilities,' King replied. 'I'm expecting much more here.'
'I think you're beginning to enjoy this, Dr King.'
'It's more exciting than my work at Hendon,' King said without the slightest trace of irony. 'Here, the possibilities are limitless. The mysteries of longevity will eventually be solved here - and the cyborgs will come even before that. You have no cause to worry.'
'I'm not the worrying kind,' Wilson said. 'Thank you, Dr King.' After casting a final, curious glance at the wide, staring, unreadable eyes in the guillotined head of Marlon Clarke, Wilson left the laboratory, crossed a catwalk, and glanced down a dizzying drop to the mass of men in black coveralls working on skeletal saucer structures in the immense, arc-lit workshop with walls of solid rock. He then entered a tunnel still being hacked out of the mountain's interior with the sweat of slave labour. Reminded, by the gloom, bedlam, dust and cracking whips, of the Nordhausen Central Works in the Harz mountains, he was glad to get through the nightmarish tunnel and emerge to the viewing bay overlooking one of the multiplying landing pads for the saucers. As this one was located directly below his office, landing pads for the saucers. As this one was located directly below his office, foot saucer that had ascended to his level during his discussion with Kammler - the one that was transporting Ernst Stoll to Paraguay.
Taking the lift down through the interior of the mountain, Wilson emerged to the cleared area that had become a landing pad, now covered in a film of powdery snow. The saucer was resting on its four hydraulic legs, with its exit door tilting out from the base to form a short flight of steps down to the ground - a recent, much welcomed innovation. As the raised, transparent

dome was uncovered, Wilson could see the crew inside. Ernst Stoll and Kammler were standing near the front edge of the saucer, talking with the artificial smiles of men who secretly despise one another. They drew apart when Wilson approached them.
‘Well,’ Wilson said, ‘the day has come at last. It’s been a long wait. No regrets?’
‘No regrets,’ Stoll said. ‘Naturally, I’d rather stay here with you, but I’ll do what I have to.’
‘I’m glad,’ Wilson said, looking into Stoll’s dulled gaze and realising just how much he had changed since first they had met in Berlin in 1938. Since then, Stoll had lost his dream of becoming a rocket engineer, lost his faith in the Nazis, lost his wife and child - lost everything. Now he only had Wilson, who cared little for him but was all too willing to use him. Wilson glanced at Kammler, then nodded at the flying saucer. ‘Is it ready to leave?’
‘Yes,’ Kammler said. ‘We were just waiting for you.’
Wilson shook hands with Stoll. ‘Enjoy your work - and good luck.’
‘Thank you,’ Stoll said, releasing Wilson’s hand, shaking Kammler’s hand less readily, then ducking low to slip under the base of the saucer and clamber up the ladder into the machine. The ladder was drawn up electronically behind him, sealing the exit, then Wilson and Kammler moved back with the other men to take their positions behind transparent protective shields in the small caves hacked out of the rock. Artur Nebe, the deadly former SS officer, now in charge of Wilson’s security, was already there with some of his armed guards. He looked at Wilson with dark, inscrutable eyes, resting his hand, as always, on his holstered pistol.
‘Do you think he can be trusted?’ Nebe asked.
‘Yes,’ Wilson replied. ‘At least until he goes insane. Until then, just to be sure, we’ll visit him on a regular basis and check what he’s up to. I’m sure he’ll do the job well.’
‘Let’s hope so,’ Nebe said.
A high-pitched whistling sound came from the saucer, then it changed into an angry roaring. A cloud of steam caused by melting snow swirled around the glittering machine as it lifted off the ground, swaying from side to side, bobbing gently up and down. The saucer remained like that for a few seconds, swaying and bobbing magically, roaring angrily, turning the swirling snow into great clouds of steam that made the light from the arc lamps bend and quiver to form a dazzling web. The saucer ascended slowly,

vertically, as if on invisible strings, until it had cleared the snow-capped peaks of the mountain, just above Wilson's office. There it roared even louder and seemed to quiver like a bow-string, until suddenly it went silent, became motionless for a second, then shot vertically into the azure sky and almost instantly vanished.

'Perfect,' Kammler said.

'And here comes the other one,' Nebe said, his dark eyes glinting watchfully.

The other saucer, also 300 feet in diameter, had appeared out of nowhere to hover just above the snow-capped peaks and then begin its descent. It came down as gracefully as the first one had ascended and landed as lightly as a feather on the same launching pad. When it had whined back into silence, its trap door opened and angled down to the ground to form steps. A middle-aged man emerged, wearing a black coverall and boots. He was followed by the five crewmembers, all dressed in grey coveralls. When Kammler stepped forward to receive the flight records from the crewmembers, the man in black walked up to Wilson and gave a slight, formal bow.

'Well?' Wilson asked him. 'Did it go well?'

'Yes, sir,' the man, Flight Captain Friedrich, replied. 'We flew over a few air bases without much success, but finally, at Godman Field, near Louisville, Kentucky, we were pursued by four F-51 fighter planes. One of them was more foolhardy than the others and pursued us to nearly twenty thousand feet. We let him catch up with us. When he was still climbing and just below us, as close as he dared come, we used your new laser weapon against him. It worked, sir. Beautifully. The F-51 cut out, went into a spin, and was splitting in two even before it crashed. We later heard on the radio that the pilot was killed. Air Force pilot Thomas F. Mantell. A World War Two hero. A good choice, don't you think?'

'You didn't exactly choose him,' Nebe coldly corrected him, 'but certainly, for our propaganda purposes, you couldn't have come across a better victim. Now the US Air Force will be very frightened indeed, which is what we require.'

'It's also good to know that the laser weapon developed in Kahla actually works,' Wilson said. 'We're pleased, Friedrich. You've done well.'

He squeezed Friedrich's shoulder, glanced at Kammler and Nebe, then turned away and walked back into the mountain.

Chapter Seven

Fuller made good use of his time before interviewing the former Projekt Saucer scientist, Walter Miethe. Forced by his assignment to return to New Mexico, he decided to learn as much as he could about the V-2 rockets before discussing them, and more important related matters, with the Kraut scientist now working for the Army's First Guided Missile Battalion, located in White Sands.

Driving out of town at dawn, past the bright orange-and-white signs saying ALAMOGORDO: HOME OF THE ATOMIC BOMB, CENTRE OF ROCKET DEVELOPMENT!, Fuller headed for White Sands, where a V-2 launching was to take place later in the morning. The drive took him across desert filled with nothing but sagebrush, past isolated gas stations charging twenty-five cents a gallon, to the 3,600 square miles of even more parched desert, sand dunes, and cattle-grazing land, which encompassed the White Stands Proving Ground, surrounded by the distant, closely bunched peaks of the aptly named Organ Mountains.

Not particularly fond of ranchers, rattlesnakes, mountain lions or coyotes, Fuller was glad to reach the government's first rocket centre. He knew he was getting close when he hit Highway 70 and found it clogged with motorists trying to find a good vantage point for the launching. Rather than being classified, the V-2 launchings (or 'shoots' as they were commonly called), which took place every couple of weeks, were treated as gala occasions and used as military PR exercises on the local populace. Fuller was therefore not surprised, when he approached White Sands in the morning's dazzling light, to find himself in the thick of cars and buses coming in from Las Cruces, Alamogordo, and El Paso, bringing farmers, cowboys, housewives, young mothers with new-born babies, schoolchildren, Boy Scout troops, students from the international rocket school, ROTC men, National Guardsmen, and members of the Chamber of Commerce and civic clubs. Many of these would tour an assembly hangar and the White Sands Proving Ground Museum, housed in a long Army van, where a V-2 rocket was on display, see a movie about guided missiles, visit the launching site, then scramble for a good position in the camp viewing area, located approximately seven miles away.

American know-how, Fuller thought proudly.

He was even more impressed when he entered the White Sands camp and found it swarming with state and municipal officials, retired and active Mexican generals, ordinary GIs, naval ratings, Air Force engineers, and top

brass from the Pentagon, West Point, and Annapolis.
‘It’s like the goddamned Fourth of July,’ he said to Captain Edward ‘Ed’ Gunderson of the First Guided Missile Battalion, in his office near the Proving Ground museum. ‘I thought all this would’ve been top-secret, but these folks are having a party.’
‘It’s kind of a festive day,’ Ed said. ‘The rocket shoots are still exciting. You can’t keep a shoot secret - I mean the rockets are so damned visible - so everyone’s invited to come along. The real secrets are the payloads in the rockets - and the public don’t see those.’
‘What kind of payloads?’
‘The permanent personnel of the Proving Ground are both civilian and military, so it depends on who’s financing and sharing the individual rocket. In this instance, General Electric has thermometers on board because they’re interested in the problems of heat transfer; the Naval Research Laboratory is sending up a spectrograph to measure the spectral qualities of light at high altitudes; and the University of Michigan is contributing an air-sample bottle, to suck in a sample of the atmosphere and then seal itself. Even Harvard University, would you believe, is sending up a packet of seeds to learn how cosmic radiation effects them. So while the rocket shoot isn’t secret, the results of the tests certainly will be.’
‘Who’s most interested in the rockets?’
‘Military men and scientists are equally interested, but for different reasons. The scientists are mostly interested in pure scientific research - an orbital satellite for the checking of weather and other atmospheric data is their long-term aim - but the military men – wouldn’t you know it? - are after an atom bomb transported by guided missile. That says it all, doesn't it?’
Fuller’s instinct was to say: ‘Why not? We’ve got to protect ourselves from the Commies and other enemies.’ But realising that this might antagonise his new friend, he said, instead, ‘Yeah, I guess it does, Ed. So when do I get to talk to the Kraut?’
‘Dr Miethe?’
‘Yeah.’
‘Right after the launch. He’s out in the desert right now with one of the Recovery Officers, waiting to pick up the rocket’s scientific instruments at the point of impact. You can see him right after that.’
‘Can you take me out to the launching site?’
‘Sure,’ Ed said. ‘No problem.’

They left the First Guided Missile Battalion HQ and drove in Ed's jeep to the launching site, burning along the camp's only paved road, which ran through seven miles of sagebrush and dunes, with the organ-pipe peaks of the mountains to the west, on the far edge of the otherwise flat terrain. The journey only took ten minutes, but the wind was hot and filled with sand, making Fuller feel dry-throated and sunscorched by the time the V-2 appeared as a patch of glinting white in the distance. A minute later, the jeep was close enough to let Fuller see that the rocket, painted white but with a pointed, silver warhead, now raised into a vertical position, was being planted on a portable launching platform by a specially equipped truck. Ed drove on to where the rocket was and they got out of the jeep.

The V-2 looked lonely in the desert waste, even though about a hundred men, civilian and army, were gathered around it. The rocket was now straddled by a sixtyfoot tall crane, which had platforms at different levels, where the launch crew were working like beavers while GIs climbed up and down ladders, opening and closing the instrument panels, and, on the ground, the surveyors checked the vertical alignment. It looked like organised chaos.

'Come on,' Ed said to Fuller. 'Let's check out the blockhouse.'

'What's that?'

'Headquarters for the shoot.'

The blockhouse was an expansive, low concrete structure located about a hundred yards west of the launching platform, reminding Fuller of the pillboxes he had attacked as a marine during the war. Inside, it was blessedly cool and contained only instrumentation relating to the V-2, with lights flickering constantly on the consoles and other equipment making rhythmic clicking sounds. The thick, protective walls of the blockhouse contained three narrow viewing windows of thick laminated glass which, when Fuller looked, showed only the fins at the bottom of the V-2 being prepared for launching. There were also oxygen masks and bottles hanging on the walls.

'The rocket could keel over and fall into the blockhouse,' Ed explained reassuringly, 'cutting off our exit. The walls of the blockhouse are so thick they probably wouldn't cave in, but the masks would be needed to protect us from the toxic gases that could seep out of the rocket and fill this place before we could escape. Come on - only twenty people are allowed in here during a shoot and you're not invited. You can come with me as part of a field crew. They're stationed right across the Proving Range, in the desert

and mountains. Their job is to keep track of the rocket's flight and phone their reports in to the blockhouse. You wanna come?'

'Hell, yes,' Fuller said. He hadn't enjoyed himself so much since fighting the Japs at Iwo Jima and was glad to get out of the packed, gloomy blockhouse. Once outside, he noticed that the GIs were no longer swarming over the raised V-2, but had been replaced by a lot of civilians, all on the third platform, about fifty feet up.

'The guys in charge of instrumentation,' Ed explained. 'Let's get in the jeep.'

They drove away from the blockhouse, heading into the desert, arriving a couple of minutes later at Radar Station D, an encampment of half-a-dozen trailers, containing radar and other equipment, located a mile east of the launch area. When Fuller got out of the jeep and looked back where he had come from, he saw heatwaves rising off the plain in front of the rocket.

Wiping sweat from his face, he followed Ed into one of the trailers. It contained the telemeter, which would transmit data on temperatures, wind pressures and cosmic rays during the rocket's eight-minute flight, and three special cameras, which would make a pictorial record of the flight. Men stripped to the waist and wearing shorts, their muscular bodies sweat-slicked, had taken up positions behind the cameras. As this meant that the shoot was imminent, Ed led Fuller back outside, where they could get a good view.

As zero hour approached, more people poured into the encampment, including a lot of full colonels. Instructions were being broadcast from a PA system that linked up all the field stations. Shortly after, a pair of Stinson L-5 observation planes appeared in the sky, the countdown began and continued until it reached X-minus One. Then the seconds were counted off: 'Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one - *Fire*!'

A distant, bass rumbling sound soon became a mighty roaring, then flames shot out around the base of the rocket and turned to boiling black smoke. From where Fuller stood, it looked as if the rocket was on fire, about to explode, yet remarkably it didn't move immediately. Instead, the 1,900 pounds of explosive fuel built up beneath it, only gradually lifting it off the launching tower. The rocket rose slowly, dramatically, as if about to fall back again, but kept climbing in that leisurely manner out of spewing yellow flame and boiling smoke. When it broke free from the launching tower, spitting a red flame from its tail, the roaring washed over Fuller like a wave

and the ground shook beneath him. He covered his ears with his hands and put his head back, looking upwards, feeling tremendous, almost sexual excitement as the roaring turned into the loudest noise he had ever heard and the rocket started putting real distance between itself and the Earth. Fuller's neck could bend no further when the rocket became no more than a flickering flame, curving up and away, until it disappeared altogether, leaving Fuller to squint into nothing but the vast, empty sky.
When he straightened his neck to look about him, he saw Ed's grin and raised thumb. Fuller felt extraordinarily alive, completely physical, and at last had a very real sense of the world that was coming.
No wonder they're scared, he thought.

Fuller didn't like Commies, Japs or Germans, but he tried to be civil when he interviewed Walter Miethe later that afternoon in the headquarters of the First Guided Missile Battalion. The office was small and spartan, containing a desk and three chairs. There was nothing on the desk. Two of the chairs were at one side of it, with Miethe in one of them. Fuller, at the other side, had a good view of White Sands, its chapel framed by the window, which was open. The bawling of GIs playing on the basketball court came in loud and clear.

'Cigarette?' Fuller asked. Miethe shook his head, indicating refusal. He had black hair and eyes as dark as pitch, though they still revealed wariness. He was a man who had been asked a lot of questions and didn't want to hear more. 'Do you mind if I do?' Fuller asked, lighting up before Miethe could answer. 'No,' Miethe said. 'Of course not.' Fuller grinned. 'You don't smoke at all.' Again Miethe replied by shaking his head in a negative gesture. 'Filthy habit. Never start,' Fuller said, puffing smoke rings and watching them drift away, pretty close to Miethe's face. 'So you know why I'm here, right?'

'I can guess,' Miethe replied.
'You worked for an American called Wilson and we're trying to find him.' Miethe sighed wearily. 'I'm sorry, I can't help you. I can tell you what I know

about Projekt Saucer, but I don't know anything more about Wilson. He's probably dead.'
'What makes you think that?'
'There were two saucer construction programmes: one by *Flugkapitän* Rudolph

Schriever, the other by Wilson. The two saucer teams were separated in 1944. Wilson's team was placed under the command of SS Brigadier Hans Kammler and transferred under the supervision of Captain Ernst Stoll to Kahla, near the underground rocket construction plant at Nordhausen, in the Harz Mountains. I went with Schriever and his team to Prague, so I never saw Wilson after that. My closest associate on Projekt Saucer, Habermohl, was sent by Schriever to work on part of the programme in Breslau, where he was captured by the Soviets. As for Schriever, the last I saw of him was when he was running away from murderous Czechoslovak Partisans at the BMW Plant in Prague, when the Russians were advancing on that city. However, just before that happened, we received unofficial notification that Wilson's team had been evacuated from Kahla in April 1944 and that Wilson had been shot by General Kammler, to prevent him falling into the hands of the advancing Americans.'

'But you had no proof of his death.'

'No.'

'And you've heard nothing about him since?'

'Absolutely nothing.'

Fuller gazed steadily at Miethe's dark, wary eyes and wondered if he was telling

the truth. Maybe, maybe not. Wilson was a shadowy figure, a teasing conundrum, but what Fuller had learnt about him so far had convinced him that the man was cunning and dangerous, with a long, deadly reach. Lots of people had reason to be scared of Wilson and Miethe might be one of them.

'Your recent boss, Werner von Braun, was in charge of the Nordhausen Central

Works about the same time Wilson was in Kahla. Did he and Wilson co-operate?' 'I don't know. I wasn't there. I was with Schriever in Prague. However, I doubt

that they had anything to do with one another. Indeed, I don't believe von Braun even

knew that Wilson was in Kahla. Ernst Stoll, who was in charge of Nordhausen and

Kahla during Kammler's many absences - Kammler was then overseeing the firing of

V-1 rockets from The Hague - kept Wilson's presence in Kahla a tight secret. No one

got in or out of Kahla, other than Stoll and Kammler, so I doubt that von Braun knew
they were there.'
'What about the early days? You worked directly under Wilson in Kummersdorf,
when von Braun was on the other side of the firing range. Did they co-operate then?' 'No. Von Braun knew about the American, but only through gossip. Though
Wilson was compelled to pass on certain innovations to von Braun, this was not
reciprocated and the two men never met. Then, of course, von Braun's rocket team
moved to Peenemünde, leaving Wilson with the whole of Kummersdorf.'
'So how did you end up in Fort Bliss with von Braun?'
'When the Czechoslovak Partisans overran the BMW Plant in Prague, I managed to make my escape. Like Schriever, I just fled across the fields until I lost my pursuers. After that, like thousands of others, I made my way back to Germany, by foot and by begging lifts, until I was captured - luckily, by the Americans, not the
Russians.'
'Lucky indeed,' Fuller said.
'By that time,' Miethe continued, ignoring the sarcasm, 'Brigadier Hans Kammler
had transferred von Braun and his men to an army barracks in Oberammergau in the
Bavarian Alps. There, they were held behind barbed wire and under SS guard, until
joined by General Dornberger, when they were allowed to move into the village of
Oberjoch. The Americans had since transported me to the town of Reutte, in the
Austrian Tyrol, for lengthy interrogation. Shortly after the Führer's death, on the
second of May, 1945, Dornberger and his men, including von Braun, surrendered to
the American 44th Infantry Division in Reutte and I was placed in custody with them.

By June, I was on my way to America with von Braun and many of his V-2 specialists. Now...' Miethe shrugged indifferently. 'Here I am.'
'You like America?' Fuller asked him.
'I like my work,' Miethe replied, 'and here I can do that.'
Don't do me any favours, Fuller thought, outraged that American generosity could
be treated with such contemptuous indifference. 'What about the beer?' he asked,
grinning. 'You like American beer?'
'I don't drink,' Miethe replied.
Fuller lit one cigarette with the stub of the other, then sat back in his chair and blew
smoke rings, watching them drift towards Miethe's face before dissipating.
'I've seen the drawings of Schriever's saucer,' he said. 'It looks just like the real
thing.'
'The real thing?'
'Yeah. The ones that have been causing such a stir over the past year or so. Do you
think there's any connection?'
'Yes. I agree with Schriever on that. He's been telling the West German press that
the UFOs are man-made and based on our original German designs. I believe he's
correct.'
'How good was Schriever's saucer? The one you tested in Prague in 1945.'
Miethe offered a superior smile. 'Not very good. It barely hovered above ground
level, wobbling wildly, then it crashed back down.'
'So what makes you agree with Schriever?'
'Schriever was a pretender who always tried to get credit for ideas that he stole
from the Americans. I don't agree that the present UFO scare is caused by saucers
constructed from Schriever's designs, which in truth were incomplete; what I believe
is that they're saucers based on Wilson's designs for a much better saucer

known as
the *Kugelblitz*. While even that saucer did not have the widely reported capabilities of
the UFOs, it was highly advanced and could have been the prototype for the saucers
now being sighted. Whether Wilson is alive or dead, it's my belief that enough of his designs, if not the actual prototype, were captured by the Soviets or Americans - or both - to let them build more advanced models. It is my belief, then, that the UFOs
are man-made saucers, constructed here or in Russia - maybe in both countries.' Studying Miethe in silence for a moment, Fuller considered his options. One was
to invite him for a drive into the desert, then slit his throat and bury him under the
dunes. The other was to utilise his knowledge for the new saucer programme. Miethe
knew too much already to be allowed to run loose, which meant that either he should
be allowed to work for the US government or that he should be taken out totally -
obliterated. Fuller had his own preference – a quick burial in the desert - but
unfortunately he was hampered by his superiors and the country's long-term needs. 'What I'm going to tell you,' he said, 'will commit you for life. If you listen to
what I tell you, I won't be able to pretend you didn't hear it. That means I'll have to
take strong action if you try going elsewhere. If you want to spend the rest of your
days working on saucer projects, then you better listen to what I say; but if you're
frightened of making that kind of commitment, you better tell me to shut up. You
understand, Miethe?'
The German stared steadily, suspiciously at him, then nervously wiped his lips
with his hand.
'What if I don't listen?'

‘You’ll be free to return to Germany,’ Fuller lied, thinking of that burial in the
desert, ‘which may well be the only choice you’ll have, as you’ll find no work here.
Either you work for the US government or not at all - at least not in this country. So
what way do you want it?’
Miethe was silent for a considerable time, but his pitch-black gaze was steady and
intense, searching Fuller’s face for hidden meanings. Eventually, taking a deep breath
and letting it out, he said, ‘You believe Wilson’s still alive, don’t you?’
‘Yes,’ Fuller said.
‘And the saucers?’
‘We now have our own, but they’re not that advanced. We based them on designs
found in Nazi Germany and have reason to believe they were done by Wilson. We
think we can advance on what we’ve already got, but it’s gonna take a lot of time and
money. In the meantime, we have the other saucers to contend with, and certainly
they’re too advanced to be our own.’
‘The Russians?’
‘We know they got Habermohl and a lot of rocket scientists, but even if they were
constructing their own saucers, they’d have the same problems as us: not enough time
or money. In other words, if the Russians have saucers, they’re not likely to be much
more advanced than ours.’
‘Which leaves Wilson.’
‘Right.’
Now Miethe looked frightened. ‘Do you know where he is?’
‘We think we know approximately where he is, but I can’t tell you where that is
just yet.’

‘Because I haven’t committed myself.’
‘You committed yourself by asking about Wilson. Now you can’t back out, Miethe.’
Shocked, Miethe straightened up in his chair, staring beyond Fuller’s head, doubtless recalling his early days in Kummersdorf with the Machiavellian American.
Fuller saw that Miethe was now truly frightened and would want his protection. ‘If we’re right,’ he said, ‘Wilson is far away... but he has a long reach.’ ‘With his saucers.’
‘Correct.’
Miethe nodded, rubbing his sweaty hands on his pants, then bit his lower lip. ‘So,’
he said, sounding as if he was sighing. ‘I am in. I am yours. What do you want with
me?’
‘You have a wife and children in Germany,’ Fuller said. ‘A boy and girl, twelve
and ten years old respectively. Hans and Irena.’
‘Yes,’ Miethe said, looking even more concerned. ‘Why do you - ?’ ‘You’ll want them with you,’ Fuller said. ‘And you’ll want them out of reach. A
new flying-saucer project, based on a combination of Schriever’s earlier designs and
the more advanced designs found in Kahla, Thuringia - presumably Wilson’s work -
is about to be financed jointly by the US and Canadian governments. The contract
was won by the A.V. Roe Company and construction will take place at their plant in
Malton, Ontario. That’s in Canada, not America, and we thought you might appreciate being there. Do you agree?’
‘Yes,’ Miethe said.
‘Good. I’ll make arrangements for your wife and kids to be flown out of Germany
and you’ll all go to Canada shortly after. Any questions, Miethe?’
‘Not for now, Mr Fuller.’
Fuller nodded, stood up, and shook the German’s hand. He wiped his hand

on his
pants as he walked from the room.

Early that evening, Fuller phoned his wife from his temporary accommodation in the officers's quarters of White Sands. The marriage between him and Belinda Wolfe had been a battlefield from the first day to the last and they had separated eighteen months ago, two years after the honeymoon. Belinda, the ravishing, brunette daughter of wealthy natives of Georgetown, Washington DC, had been unable to tolerate Fuller's blatant promiscuity, distaste for domesticity, love of danger, gratuitous cruelty with enemies and friends alike, and horror at the very thought of having children. Fuller and Belinda hadn't met since the acrimonious separation, though they had good reason to speak often by phone: the impending divorce. Now, when they spoke, Belinda told him that the divorce papers were coming through and she was thrilled to be rid of him.

'Thanks a million, Belinda.'

An hour later, Fuller was celebrating at a dance in the Rocket Room of the Officer's Club. High on a bellyful of lousy American beer, which he loved (those lousy, tasteless Krauts!), he enjoyed the live band, danced with a few ladies, then played the slot machines standing along the pine wall adorned with stag heads. Also playing was the wife of an Army Air Force captain who was on a two-week flying course at Nellis AFB, Las Vegas, Nevada. Fuller engaged her in conversation, bought her a few drinks, played Ping-Pong with her on the porch, then drove her out into the desert, where, under the dark-blue, star-filled sky, he fucked her brains out. When she recovered and was sobbing, filled with guilt and remorse, though displaying some confusion by saying she loved him, he dumped her well outside the base and told her to walk it off.

Ten minutes later, having packed to leave the next day, he fell into his bed in his room in the officers's quarters, went to sleep almost instantly, and dreamt about a V-2 rocket flying across the curved earth and being tailed by one of Wilson's flying saucers. He awoke with an erection that resembled the V-2, but his headache didn't permit him any pleasure, so he rolled out of bed. Wondering about the elusive thread that led obliquely from the V-2s to the UFOs, or flying saucers, he showered, put on his clothes, and left White Sands for good, gratefully heading back to the real world and its infinite mysteries.

Chapter Eight

Even in the desert of the Southwest, just north of Albuquerque, New Mexico, it was freezing at night. Squatting in the sand beside the other members of his UFO tracking team, looking up at the moon and stars, but seeing no unidentifieds, Dwight was torn between his excitement over what he was doing and depression caused by being away from home again, leaving Beth hurt and angry. It had been his own idea to send special patrols out into the desert around Albuquerque in a determined bid to resolve the mystery of the recent plague of green fireball sightings. A good idea from the point of view of the ATIC, not so good for the marriage.

The sightings had begun in November 1948, just three months ago, when a lot of folks around Albuquerque had reported seeing what seemed like green balls of fire flying across the skies. At first, because thousands of conscript GIs had recently been discharged from the army, taking souvenirs such as Very pistols, local Air Force Intelligence at Kirtland AFB had written the sightings off as flares. They were, however, forced to change their tune when, on the night of December 5, Air Force pilot Captain Goede and his co-pilot, flying a C-47 transport at 18,000 feet ten miles east of Albuquerque, observed a green fireball the size of a huge meteor flashing across the sky just ahead of them. Later, in their official report on the sighting, Goede and his co-pilot both insisted that it could not have been a meteor, as it had ascended from low altitude, near the slopes of the Sandia Mountains, then arched upward and levelled out, just like an airplane. A few minutes after that sighting, the captain of a Pioneer Airlines Flight also reported seeing a green ball of fire east of Las Vegas, New Mexico, when he was flying en route to Albuquerque. He, also, confirmed that the ascending flight of the green fireball proved that it could not have been a meteorite.

After that, the fireballs appeared practically every night and most of the reports landed on Randall’s desk at the ATIC, in Wright-Patterson AFB. While analysing the reports with the help of Bob Jackson, Dwight arranged for Dr Lincoln La Paz, head of the University of Mexico’s Institute of Meteoritics, to look into the sightings. Subsequently, La Paz reported that he had personally witnessed the green fireballs both from the ground and from an aircraft, in the company of some distinguished scientists from the AEC Los Alamos Laboratory, and was of the opinion that the green fireballs were not meteorites. Their green colouring was too vivid, their trajectories were too flat, they were not accompanied by the sound and shock waves of natural meteorites, and, finally, they were simply *too big*.

The worst row of Dwight's marriage to date had erupted when, after ten more nights of green fireball sightings, he came under pressure to find out what was causing them. Not considering the time of year, he asked for permission to establish three cinetheodolite stations near Albuquerque, in hopes of ascertaining the altitude, speed and size of the UFOs. Unfortunately, permission came in the form of a formal, written order stating that the stations could only be set up and manned for a period of a fortnight, beginning in December and ending January - in other words, over the Christmas and New Year period.

Cursing his own stupidity, Dwight was then cursed out by Beth when he told her that he wouldn't be home for Christmas. Her Irish temper finally exploded and they had a dreadful row. Were this not torment enough, Beth then took Nichola to have Christmas with her folks in Dayton while Dwight and his three unhappy sighting teams set up their cinetheodolite stations in the desert around Albuquerque.

To make matters even worse, nothing was spotted.

In truth, Beth had never really forgiven him for their lost Christmas and New Year

- particularly since no green fireballs or other UFOs materialised and it all seemed a waste of time. Now, here he was again, a mere four weeks later, in February 1949, in the middle of what he hoped was the most foolproof plan yet devised for the study of UFOs.

This time he had put together a dozen separate four-man sighting teams, with a radio operator, an instrument man, a timer, and a recorder. All the teams would be assigned a special radio frequency through which they could keep in touch with one another without being heard by outsiders. When a green fireball, or any kind of UFO, was spotted, the radio operator would immediately relay its presence to the other teams to enable them to track it simultaneously. While he was doing so, the instrument man would be measuring the UFO's angles of elevation and azimuth, the timer would be calling out the time, and the recorder would be writing the details down. By then comparing the records of the many different teams, the speed, size, altitude and flight characteristics of the UFO could at last be accurately ascertained.

Dwight was pleased with himself.

Nevertheless, he was also cold and depressed. Cold because the desert, so hot during the day, was as chilly as Antarctica by night - or seemed to be so.

Depressed because the stormy waters of his marriage had not been calmed by this latest trip and, even worse, because, yet again, they had been here four nights in a row and nothing had shown up.
Dwight was even more depressed because he was head of Project Sign and yet had never seen a UFO in his life.
Sensibly, once it became apparent to Dwight's team that nothing was happening, they decided to take turns at guard to ensure that all of them would at least get some sleep, even if only for short periods. Now it was Dwight's turn, it was four in the morning, and he had another two hours to go before he could waken one of the others.
There they were scattered around him, three men in sleeping bags, looking as dead as the flat plain of the desert and the vast, starry cosmos. Dwight's eyes felt like lead and he had to fight to keep them open, which he did by concentrating on the sky while praying for something odd or exciting to materialise.
It could be an eerie experience. The nocturnal sky played many tricks. You looked up at the stars, already dead, in the past, and you couldn't believe they weren't there, they seemed so damned real. Then, of course, the sky kept changing. Things were constantly on the move. Even a trained observer could be fooled by shooting stars, comets, meteors, lenticular and noctilucent clouds, dust and ice crystals, temperature inversions, corona discharges, plasmoids, ball-lightning, parhelia and paraselenae, or mock suns and sundogs, mock moons and moondogs, and even the ever deceiving planet Venus. In ancient times such phenomenon had been viewed as mystical visions or visitations by the gods of the sea or sky. In modern times they were often mistaken for UFOs, even by trained observers.
Just like me, Dwight thought bleakly.
Sighing, trying desperately to stay awake, he was just about to fall asleep when he thought he saw something.
Rubbing his eyes, he sat up straight, preparing himself for another trick. What he saw was a streak of light, very low on the horizon... Impossible to tell the altitude from here, but it was definitely *moving*.
Left to right - no: up and down - a streak of white light, then two lights. Perhaps two lights blending into one and advancing towards him.
He rubbed his eyes and looked again. Maybe just a shooting star. No, it was too low for that, so it had to be something else. Perhaps a temperature inversion. Lights from somewhere far away. The headlamps of a car that was

moving uphill, its lights beaming into the sky, hitting a temperature inversion, and being sent on for miles to another temperature inversion that bent it again and relayed it back to Earth to form what Dwight was seeing...

No, not that. Not mock moons or moon dogs either. The light, maybe two lights - sometimes two, sometimes one - was growing longer and thinner, stretching out like chewing gum, as it advanced across the desert floor at very low altitude.

‘Jesus Christ,’ Dwight whispered, wondering if he should waken the others. ‘What the hell..?’

No, not low altitude. Not a single light either. Two separate lights, now bobbing erratically, beaming down on the desert floor.

Damn it, they were close. Too close to be high up. They were only a couple of feet above the ground, maybe not even that. Approaching. Coming towards him. Not accidentally at all. Not bobbing - bouncing - a sort of rattling in there, too... Then settling down and beaming over the track that led right to Dwight.

A car engine and squeaking springs.

‘God damn it!’ Dwight whispered.

His three companions sat up. ‘What the fuck - ?’ a dim voice queried. ‘I’ll kill the bastard in that jeep,’ Corporal Mathers said. ‘Thought we had us a UFO.’

The jeep took shape in the night, even blacker than the darkness, its headlights blinding Dwight as it turned off the road again and headed straight for him and the others. He was shading his dazzled eyes with his hand when the jeep squealed to a halt right in front of him, churning up clouds of sand.

His friend and sidekick, Air Force Captain Bob Jackson, waved at him and jumped down to the sand.

‘Hi,’ he said. ‘How’s it goin’?’

‘You came at four in the morning to ask me *that*?’

‘Not exactly,’ Bob said. He glanced down at the others, all sitting upright in their sleeping bags. ‘Okay,’ he said. ‘Go back to sleep. This is not for your ears. Happy bedy-bize, boys.’ When they had moaned and cursed and were settling back again, Bob looked directly at Dwight and said, more seriously, ‘I’m sorry, but this can’t wait.’ He took Dwight by the elbow and walked him away from the others, out of earshot. ‘You look cold,’ he said. Before Dwight could reply, Bob withdrew a hip flask from his flying jacket and

unscrewed the cap. ‘Brandy,’ he said. ‘You’re going to need it... And not just for the cold.’

Grateful, Dwight had a good slug of the brandy and felt it burning down inside him. He had another slug, felt it going straight to his head, took note of the wondrous lustre of the stars and handed the flask back.

‘Okay,’ he said. ‘What the hell is this?’

‘Your official Estimate of the Situation,’ Dwight replied.

Dwight nodded his understanding. The UFO-related death of Captain Thomas F. Mantell over Godman AFB, Kentucky, in January last year, combined with the extraordinary UFO sighting made by Eastern Airlines Captain Charles S. Chiles and co-pilot John B. Whitted near Montgomery, Alabama, on the evening of July 24, had prompted Dwight, as head of Project Sign, to write an official, top-secret Estimate of the Situation. That Estimate had outlined the whole history of UFO sightings, including the fireballs, Scandinavian ‘ghost rockets’ and American sightings before 1947. It had concluded with Dwight’s earnestly held conviction that the UFOs were of extraterrestrial origin.

‘So why the brandy?’ he asked, gazing with instinctive, growing despair over the star-covered, dark, barren desert.

Bob sucked his breath in, then let it out again. ‘Our venerable Chief of Staff, General Hoyt S.Vandenberg, has rejected the report.’

‘*What*?’

‘On the grounds that it lacks proof.’

Dwight was stunned. ‘Lacks... *proof*?’

Bob shrugged and spread his hands in the air as if begging forgiveness. ‘That’s what he said. It’s on an official, top-secret memorandum. That... and something even worse.’

‘What could be worse?’

Bob took another deep breath and let it out slowly. ‘There’s to be a whole new policy at Project Sign. In the future, Sign personnel are to assume that *all* UFO reports are hoaxes. Not only that, but we’re to check with FBI officers, and with the criminal and subversive files of police departments, looking into the private lives of the witnesses to see if they're - quote, unquote - *reliable*.’

Dwight was livid with anger. ‘By doing that,’ he said, ‘we’ll be shifting the investigations away from the actual UFOs and on to the poor bastards who report them.’

‘You’ve got it, buddy. That’s absolutely correct. As for your official Estimate of the Situation, it’s going to be incinerated and our project will be renamed Project Grudge.’
‘Is that a sour joke?’
‘No, it’s not - though it may be a sign of General Vandenberg’s displeasure with us.’
‘What he’s saying in effect is that we’re to discourage further UFO reports and keep a low profile.’
‘Right.’
‘We now exist in name only - and that name is Project Grudge.’
‘How bright you are,’ Bob said.
He handed Dwight the hip flask. Dwight took it and walked out into the darkness and sat on the sand. He had a stiff drink, then another, trying to still his racing heart. Then he looked up at the vast, starry sky, which reduced him to nothing. Eventually, Bob came to sit beside him, trying to offer some comfort.
‘What the hell’s going on?’ Dwight asked him, unable to keep the bitterness from his voice.
‘It doesn’t need spelling out,’ Bob said. ‘It’s fair warning to us all that it’s no longer wise to open your mouth too wide about UFOs.’
‘Why?’ Dwight asked, feeling increasingly confused and nervous, looking up at the night sky.
‘You tell me,’ Bob said.

Chapter Nine

With some native guides and a modest contingent of General Stroessner’s armed *Federales*, an unhappy Ernst Stoll had endured a seemingly endless journey from the dusty streets of Asuncion, along the Paraguay river by gunboat, to this jetty looming out over the muddy water. His guide, a young, gap-toothed Paraguayan called Juan Chavez, pointed proudly at the jetty and the cleared compound beneath it, as if that motley collection of thatched shacks and muddy enclosures would actually bring a smile to Ernst’s face. Instead, Ernst removed his hat, wiped the sweat from inside it, spat on the deck near Chavez’s feet, then put the hat back on and wiped his face.
‘*Scheisse*,’ he exclaimed, ‘what a filthy hole!’
‘Have a beer, *senor* Stoll. It will help cool you down. Do not let the sun dry you out. You need plenty of liquid.’

Juan Chavez was smiling, a sly, gap-toothed grimace, his dark, youthful eyes bright with mischief and the urge to be sly. Ernst nodded and took the beer, the bottle cold in his sweaty palm. He drank, wiped some beer from his lips and then glanced over his shoulder. A group of captured Ache Indians were at the aft end of the deck, all small, emaciated, their narrow eyes dulled by fear, dressed in rags and huddling close to oneanother as if for protection. Two *Federales* were guarding them, wearing jackboots, holding rifles, both gaunt-faced and bored, chewing gum, their eyes hooded beneath tatty peaked caps, their uniforms threadworn. Ernst studied them at length, feeling only contempt, recalling his own disciplined, immaculate SS troops during the war. These *Federales* were not like that. They were a bunch of murderous morons. Corrupt and led by a corrupt leader, General Stroessner, they were men whose only purpose was survival in the most expedient manner. The scum of the earth.

'This is your first time in Paraguay, *senor*?' Chavez asked, smiling slyly to reveal his missing front teeth.

Ernst stared coldly at him. Chavez was still a teenager, but he looked twice his age. This was due to his missing teeth, the scars on his cheeks, and the cunning in his old man's brown eyes. He would make a good pimp.

God, Ernst thought, these people!

'Yes,' he said. 'I have never been here before. This is the first time.'

'You will have to get used to it, *senor*. Strangers often go crazy here.'

Ernst had another drink, cooled his forehead with the bottle, and then surveyed the widening clearing as the boat inched towards it. This was a waterside village, its jetty thrusting out from the tangled shrubs and liana at the edge of the forest, where the banks of red mud angled down to the dark, muddied river. Some men were waiting on the jetty, wearing filthy shirts and pants, nearly all with cigarettes in their mouths, not one of them smiling.

'Heaven on earth,' Ernst said sarcastically. 'I'm sure I'll be happy here.'

'You are staying long, *senor*?'

'Unfortunately, yes.'

'A lot of Germans, former soldiers, live in the jungle, so you may find some company.'

'That's nice,' Ernst said, though he wanted no German friends, having been warned by Wilson to avoid them and keep to himself. What would happen here must remain a secret, no matter how much that cost him in emotional terms. His own regular company could only be the scum of this village; his

only form of relief the occasional visit from those in Antarctica. He would live here as if in a monastery, though with some compensations.
‘I trust there are some women here,’ he said.
‘Ah, yes,’ Chavez replied, grinning lasciviously. ‘You can take your pick, *senor*.’
The gunboat growled and shuddered, turning in towards the bank; it inched forward and then bounced against the tyres along the edge of the jetty. Ernst glanced back over his shoulder. One of the Ache women was wailing. A *Federale* slapped her brutally across the face and screamed a torrent of abuse. The woman’s wailing became a whimper. Ernst yawned and turned away. One of the crew had thrown a rope to a man on the jetty and the latter was tying it around an upright, bending low, shouting inanely. The boat’s engine cut out. A crewmember removed the gate. A plank was thrown across the space between the deck and the jetty, then tied to some uprights to form a crude gangplank. Ernst moved towards the plank, wanting desperately to get off, but Chavez tugged at the sleeve of his shirt and motioned him back.
‘No,’ he said. ‘First the Ache.’
Ernst stopped and stared at him, repulsed by that gap-toothed grin, but he stepped back as Chavez went to the *Federales* and bawled his instructions. The *Federales* were quick to move, venting their boredom on the miserable Indians, screaming abuse and kicking them to their feet, herding them towards the gangplank. The Indians were not so quick, weak from hunger, confused, so the *Federales* encouraged them along with vicious blows from their rifles. The women wailed and held their children, cowering from the swinging rifles, while their menfolk, uncommonly small and frail, tried in vain to protect them.
It was a familiar sight to Ernst. He recalled similar scenes from the war: the night they had left Kummersdorf and herded their slave labour, mostly wailing Jews, onto the trains in Berlin. He smiled at the recollection, feeling a stab of nostalgia, but managed to suppress it as the first of the Indians stumbled across the gangplank with their hands on their heads. Chavez was leading them down, his shirt unbuttoned and flapping loosely, his broad hat tilted over his eyes as he gave his instructions. Ernst felt the sun’s fierce heat as he studied the village, a drab collection of leaning huts made from palmetto trunks and vines, dogs and goats sniffing lethargically at the dust, babies lying on corn shucks. The poverty was total, the old and young emaciated, sunlight falling on scattered gourds, woven baskets and banana

leaves, on the giant rat that raced across the clearing and vanished into the forest. Ernst looked along the jetty. The Ache Indians had just left it. They were now at the edge of the clearing with the *Federales* surrounding them. Chavez was waving his hands, telling Ernst to disembark; so Ernst finished his beer, threw the bottle overboard, watched it glinting as it bobbed along the river and was swept out of sight. Then he went to the gangplank, crossed without enthusiasm, above the muddy, oil-slicked water, and finally stepped onto the soil of what would be his new home.

God, he thought, what a piss-hole!

Chavez, an adolescent martinet, was standing beside an emaciated native in short pants and a torn, filthy shirt. Chavez waved Ernst forward. When he reached the pair, he noted that the man was elderly, had rheumy eyes, and seemed nervous.

'This is Salano Valentinas,' Chavez said. 'The head of the village. Anything you want, you ask him. He is here as your eyes, ears and hands.'

'Welcome, *senor*,' Valentinas said, his voice as rough as sandpaper. 'I trust you had a good journey.'

'Never mind my journey,' Ernst said. 'Just show me where I'll be staying.'

'Yes, *senor*, of course.'

He turned away to lead Ernst and Chavez across the clearing, past the captured Ache Indians, who were now being herded up into the backs of two trucks, the men being punched and thumped with the butts of rifles, the women and children wailing.

'What happens to them?' Ernst asked.

'They will be sold as workers and whores to those living in compounds in the jungle - mostly Germans, of course. Some of them are being taken to your compound. You can do what you want with them.'

'Does President Morínigo know about this?'

'I don't know. Maybe not. The *Federales* who collect them are controlled by Morínigo's hatchet man, General Stroessner. General Stroessner knows everything.' More than you can imagine, Ernst thought, as they crossed the clearing, surrounded by the huts of palmetto leaves and vine, scattering goats and chickens, passing Indians roasting sweet potatoes, eventually stopping at a small, badly battered, opentopped truck that was parked at the edge of the narrow track snaking into the forest.

'I'm not staying here?' Ernst asked.

'No, *senor*,' Chavez replied. 'Your compound is ten kilometres away, hidden

deep in the forest. There, even aircraft cannot see you. You will feel safe there.'

The headman, Valentinas, climbed up onto the open rear of the truck, Chavez took the driver's seat, and Ernst clambered up beside the latter. Chavez turned on the ignition, accelerated inexpertly, and then the truck lurched off into the forest, where the trees kept the sun out. Imagining that it would be cooler in the interior, Ernst was shocked to find that it wasn't: that the humidity was much worse, overwhelming him, almost making him gag. Feeling ill, he glanced about him, taking in the riot of vegetation, tangled vines and soaring trees in the chattering green gloom relieved only by shafts of sunlight beaming down on the steaming banana leaves. The narrow track was pitted with holes, coiling snake-like between the trees and disappearing ahead of them. Chavez was beaming with pleasure, clearly enjoying the drive; this made him look more like his proper age, which was, Ernst surmised with disbelief, not much more than eighteen. The truck growled and coughed, bouncing roughly over potholes, racing through shafts of sunlight that beamed down through the trees and illuminated the steaming vegetation. Ernst was suffocating. He was sweating and felt feverish. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw the old man in the back, leaning forward with his chin on his raised knees, his rheumy eyes fixed on nothing.

My new companions, Ernst thought with revulsion. I'll go mad in this hellhole! The drive seemed to take forever, an endless journey through heat and gloom, but eventually the truck burst into the sunlight of another cleared area. Lines of barbed wire formed a fence around an expansive wooden building, its sloping roof supported by tree trunks and covered in woven vines and banana leaves. Chavez drove the truck through the open gates in the fence and braked inside the compound, creating a cloud of dust.

'*Scheisse*!' Ernst barked, coughing to clear his throat of the dust as he climbed down from the truck. 'Are you trying to choke us, you fool?'

Chavez just laughed, then led Ernst and Valentinas across the clearing towards the big house with the open veranda running all the way around it, under a roof raised above the top rooms, which were open to the elements and obviously used only by the servants. The compound was busy, filled with men, women and children, most gathered around open fires, roasting sweet potatoes. Though watching Ernst's arrival with nervous curiosity, they made no move towards him.

'The barbed wire is electrified,' Chavez informed him. 'Make sure you don't

touch it. So, *senor*, here we are!'

They climbed the steps of the veranda to stop under an awning of vine and leaves. A table and chairs had been placed near the entrance to the house. A native woman, too stout to be healthy, as ugly as a bat, stood by the table, wearing a white blouse and long skirt, a towel draped over her right arm. She bowed to Ernst. He simply grunted and glanced about him. On the table were two bottles of brandy, half a dozen empty glasses, and a cup filled with fat, white, wriggling worms.

Seeing what Ernst was looking at, Chavez grinned and picked up a worm. He watched it wriggling between his fingers for a moment, then bit off its head, spat it out and swallowed the rest of it. 'Koro worms!' he explained, picking the cup off the table and holding it out to Ernst. 'Try one, *senor*!' When Ernst shuddered with revulsion, Chavez chortled and put the cup back down. 'You will soon learn to enjoy them,' he said. 'You will learn to enjoy many strange things here. Please, *senor*, take a chair.'

Ernst took one of the wooden chairs by the table, placing his pistol and holster upon it. The native woman then knelt in front of him, to laboriously pull off his boots and wipe his feet with the towel. When this was done, she shuffled backwards, still on her knees, until Chavez barked another instruction at her. Standing upright, she filled the two glasses with brandy and handed them to Ernst and Chavez. The latter offered his gap-toothed smile and held his glass up in a toast. Ignoring him, Ernst drank most of the brandy in one thirsty gulp. Casting his gaze over the compound, which resembled an untended farmyard, covered in smoke and filled with worthless human livestock, he realised that he was not thrilled to be here.

'So,' he said, not trying to hide his bitterness, 'this is it: my new home.'

'Yes, *senor*,' Chavez said.

'And this so-called headman – ' Ernst indicated Valentinas with a contemptuous wave of his hand – 'now works for me.'

'That is correct, *senor*. He will translate and tell you all you need to know. He will also take care of the supplies, which will be shipped in from Asuncion every month. He already has his instructions, *senor*, and will not let you down.'

'I hope not,' Ernst said.

Chavez finished his brandy and placed his glass back on the table. 'Now I must be off, *senor*. I go back to Asuncion. I work on the gunboat that sails regularly between there and here, so we will meet quite a lot. If you need

me, just call. Goodbye… How you say it? *Auf Wiedersehen*! Until the next time, *senor*.'

Chavez waved, sauntered in a leisurely manner back to the truck, climbed in and drove out of the compound with a lot of rattling and banging.

'*Dreck*!' Ernst muttered, feeling tired and impatient. Pouring another stiff brandy, he ordered Valentinas to gather together on the veranda the women selected as potential household staff. Valentinas brought a dozen of them, some young, others old. After inspecting them, as he had often done in Nordhausen - pinching here, prodding there, checking their teeth - Ernst rejected the eldest and most ugly, picking mostly the young to serve him, with one middle-aged crone to be in charge of them. Those chosen bowed solemnly, fearfully, and then were ushered by the old crone up the stairs at the side of the house, to sort themselves out on the open floor beneath the raised roof. Until Ernst decided otherwise, that's where they would live from now on, separated from family and friends, working only for him.

He had another drink of brandy, feeling marginally better for it, then strapped his holster on and stepped off the porch, followed by the obedient Valentinas. Disgusted by the seemingly disorganised state of the compound, he told Valentinas to get rid of the open fires and move the natives back into the ramshackle living accommodations located on both sides of the clearing. The natives so housed would then be used as the labour force required to dig out the centre of the compound and turn it into a reinforced, concrete landing pad for the flying saucers. Also, though the barbed-wire fence was already electrified, he wanted to erect watchtowers and have them manned at all times with machine-gun crews.

Ernst barked his numerous instructions with renewed, drunken vigour while Valentinas, always standing in his shadow, nodded affirmatively.

'Any mistakes,' Ernst informed him, 'and you'll be dealt with personally, harshly, by me. Understood?'

'Yes, *senor*.'

The sun had started sinking when Ernst returned to the house, this time letting Valentinas lead him inside to show him around. There were two floors beneath the open floor at the top, both with balconies overlooking the living room. The beds in the rooms located along the balconies were imported four-posters covered in mosquito nets, and the bedroom furniture, Ernst noted, was mostly imported German antique. The downstairs living room, however, was filled with well-cushioned bamboo chairs and sofas,

bookcases of waxed pine, and low tables carved from local woods. All in all, it was surprisingly comfortable, if a touch too exotic.

Satisfied, Ernst tackled a light supper of bread, cheese and fresh fruit, all washed down with an intemperate amount of brandy. Now more drunk than he had been since leaving Germany, he thought of his homeland, grew unexpectedly maudlin, and had vivid recollections of the women he had known during the war: that lascivious stripper, Brigette, who had performed in the Französischestrasse; that Polish woman, Kosilewski, who had pleasured him to betray him; even Ingrid, his wife, who had loved him but eventually came to hate him, before dying with his children in an air-raid. Those and the others, some willing, some not, some whores and some unfortunate camp inmates used in military brothels. Those women and many more. So many women. So many ways. Ernst remembered and was inflamed, wanting to have them all back, and so barked for Valentinas to bring him a girl - the youngest and prettiest of those upstairs. His wizened servant soon did so, fetching one from the top floor, and then he beat a hasty retreat when Ernst glared fiercely at him.

‘Yes, *senor*. Of course, *senor*! I will be on the veranda if you need me. I’ll sleep out there, *senor*.’

Satiated with food and drink, Ernst tried to undress the young girl, a mere stripling, and beat her badly when she tried to resist. When even the beating failed to work, but simply reduced her to tears, he threw the sobbing creature onto the floor and stormed out to the veranda.

‘I will show you what discipline is,’ he said to Valentinas, ‘and you can tell all the others. Bring in the girl’s mother.’

When the girl’s terrified mother was brought into the living room, Ernst again told the sobbing girl to remove her clothes. When the girl refused to do so, Ernst unholstered his pistol and placed it to the head of her mother, who was now also sobbing.

‘Tell her that if she doesn’t do as I say, Valentinas, I’ll blow her mother’s brains out.’

‘Yes, *senor*. Of course.’

Valentinas relayed the message and the sobbing girl, staring at her fearful mother, finally nodded agreement. The mother, still crying, was led out by Valentinas, as Ernst ordered the trembling girl to strip and lie back on the floor. When she had done so, he removed his own clothes, then stood over her, legs outspread, and told her to raise herself to her knees. Trembling, her

eyes as big as spoons, she did as she was told.
‘You will do everything I tell you,’ Ernst said. ‘Do you understand what I'm saying?’
‘Yes,’ the girl whispered, speaking English, which Ernst understood.
‘Your fear excites me,’ Ernst told her. ‘Your degradation is my joy. Now dry your damned eyes.’
Placing his hands on the back of her head, he pulled the girl towards him, closing his own eyes in expectation, making the most of his new life. The days would be long here.

Chapter Ten

The saucer was one of the early models, a mere thirty feet in diameter, descending vertically, silently, towards a dark field in Virginia, its lights flashing on and off, the seamless surface a silvery white, gleaming in a vast sea of stars, parallel to a Gorgonzola moon. Reaching the ground, it didn’t quite touch it, but merely hovered just above it, swaying slightly from side to side, until its four hydraulic legs emerged obliquely from its base and dug into the soft earth. The saucer’s lights blinked out, its silvery-white sheen turned to grey, then its steps angled down from the base.

Two men in black coveralls dropped out, followed by Wilson.
Straightening up, Wilson glanced around him, taking in the grassy hills, the empty fields, the shivering trees, then he walked across the grass to the unfenced road, where a jet-black limousine was parked. Its windows were tinted and the headlights turned off, but its rear door opened as he approached. When he slipped into the car, the flying saucer in the field took off again. It rose slowly, almost silently, to a very great height, its lights flashing on and off around the rim to form a kaleidoscope. Eventually it became dime-sized, then a mere spot of white light. That light hovered in the air, as if just another star, then it suddenly shot away and disappeared.
Wilson took the rear seat in the limousine. Beside him, Artur Nebe was wearing a grey suit with shirt and tie, looking uncomfortable out of uniform.
Too many years in the SS, Wilson thought, with a pistol always holstered on his waist. He must feel naked without it.
‘*Guten tag*, Nebe,’ Wilson said. ‘How is life in the real world?’
‘I don’t like all the politics,’ Nebe said. ‘I should be back in Antarctica.’
‘You will be. Today. Once we get this meeting over with. After that, you’ll have no reason to stay here. You’ll come back with me.’ He noticed that Nebe was staring intently at him. ‘What is it? My face?’

‘Sorry, sir. Yes, you look different. About twenty years younger.’
‘Not like an eighty-two-year old?’
‘More like sixty-two.’
Wilson smiled. ‘Plastic surgery and skin grafts. Dr King is doing a good job of preserving me in particular and researching longevity in general. I’ve also had certain joints replaced with artificial ones, steel and fibre, which King produced during his ongoing cyborg research.’
‘He certainly seems to be doing well.’
‘The knowledge that he can experiment without restraints of any kind has sent his imagination soaring and filled him with energy. He’s become a man obsessed with his work and now cares for little else. He doesn’t have to be watched any longer; his love of work has enslaved him. He’s all ours, Nebe. Completely.’
‘And his other needs?’
‘We’ve given him total freedom when it comes to the comfort girls. The sex is all he really wants when he’s not working. The needs of most men are basic.’
Nebe offered a rare, chilling smile, being himself addicted to the abducted girls used as whores, or ‘comfort girls’, in the brothel in the Antarctic colony. ‘I’m sure he didn’t get sex like that in Hendon, England. That alone should enslave him.’
‘It’s certainly helped him forget his wife and children. Family love treads on thin ice.’ Wilson rolled his window down and gazed out at the moonlit fields. The trees were silhouetted against a star-filled sky; the wind scarcely stirred. ‘When is General Samford expected?’
Nebe checked his wristwatch. ‘He should be here in five minutes. He was told to be punctual.’
‘Who arranged the meeting?’
‘A CIA agent, Sam Fuller. I’d heard he was on your trail. He was in charge of disinformation regarding the Socorro crash, back in 1947, and he went to have a talk with Mike Bradley.’
‘The one who pursued me during the war?’
‘Yes. Wounded at Kiel harbour. The explosion set by Ernst Stoll. You paid him a visit the night of the Socorro crash and warned him off his UFO investigations.’
‘Ah, yes, I remember. Have you any idea what he told Fuller?’
‘According to Fuller, nothing. But just knowing that Fuller had been to see

him made me suspicious. Then, when he also went to see von Braun and Miethe, I knew it was us he was after.'
'So?'
'I contacted him in Washington DC. A meeting was arranged. Same place - right here
- and same time. When we met, I told him I knew what he was after and that we were responsible.'
'Did you tell him where we're located?'
'I confirmed it. He already knew, of course, though not in too much detail. He'd interrogated Captain Schaeffer of U-boat 977, the one that took us to Plata del Mar, Argentina, and worked the rest of our route out from there. So he knows we're in Neu Schwabenland, though he still doesn't know the exact location. First US confirmation of the existence of our flying saucers came, he said, through the investigations of Operation Paperclip at the close of the war. Mike Bradley also worked on that, which is why he turned up at Kiel and later became obsessed with UFOs. That knowledge, as well as Bradley's turnaround after the Socorro crash, explain why Fuller went with First Lieutenant Harris to see him in Socorro. Now, a select few in the White House, the Pentagon, and the CIA, including Fuller, know we're hidden somewhere in Antarctica. They also know we have flying saucers more highly developed than those being constructed in the United States and Canada.'
'What made General Samford change his mind about meeting us? When I personally tried to set up this meeting, his minions said, "No deal".'
'Because you were using a pseudonym then - calling yourself Aldridge - and they didn't relate the name to Wilson, which is who they were looking for. Also, though they knew we were in Antarctica, they didn't believe how advanced our saucers were and assumed we were just a bunch of fanatical Nazis not much different, though possibly crazier, than those who had fled to Paraguay. Reportedly, Samford, protective of his position as US Head of Intelligence, was outraged that his minions would even consider such a meeting. I believe he described us as a bunch of escaped war criminals and demanded that an expeditionary force be sent to Antarctica to get us out and bring us back to the United States, to be tried as war criminals.'
'Rear-Admiral Byrd's Operation Highjump.'
'Correct.'
'Which we put to rout. Byrd's expedition was then cut short. The official

explanation was hurricane winds.'
'Also correct. But Samford still refused to believe we were that advanced technologically and asked for Byrd to be psychiatrically evaluated. He also demanded that all of Byrd's references to our flying saucers be removed from his official report.'
'So what made the morally outraged US Head of Intelligence change his mind?'
'I arranged for one of our saucers to hover over his house one evening, in the middle of a party he was giving in the garden of his home in Alexandria, Virginia. A lot of other top brass and their wives were in attendance and all of them saw the saucer. It was hovering right over them, casting its shadow on the lawn. *That's* what changed the stubborn General Samford's mind. He's a man who sees reason.'
Wilson smiled. 'It must have come as quite a shock to Samford's guests.'
'It sure did. All of those present were sworn to secrecy. When a couple of the wives gossiped about the incident, their husbands were transferred to Alaska. That was fair enough warning to the others. No one's talked since.'
'Who would believe them anyway? Project Grudge is now treating all those who report UFOs as cranks. Witnesses are afraid of public ridicule, so those best equipped to confirm the reality of the saucers - radar operators and pilots - are learning to keep their mouths shut. We have little to fear.'
'There they are,' Nebe said softly.
Looking beyond the driver's head, Wilson saw the headlights of another car approaching along the dark road. It slowed down and pulled into the verge, then stopped about twenty yards from the limousine. Another set of headlights appeared behind it, stopping further away. When the lights of both vehicles blinked out, Wilson saw that the other vehicle was an army troop-truck.
'Did you know about this?' he asked of Nebe.
'I told him he could bring some protection. I didn't mean a whole troop-truck.'
'No problem,' Wilson said.
He stepped from the limousine as the troops were spilling out of the truck to form a cordon across the road. All of the troops were armed. General Samford, in uniform, followed by a man in plain clothes, clambered out of the other car as Nebe joined Wilson. The two groups approached one another, stopping about three feet apart.

With his lean, almost ascetic face, General Samford did not look like a man to take fools lightly. Fuller, on the other hand, was darkly handsome, clearly cynical, deceptively relaxed and slyly watchful. He looked like a man who could handle trouble and probably relished it.
Four of the armed troops came up behind Samford and Fuller, stopping a few yards farther back.
Nebe glanced at Fuller. ‘So, we meet again.’ Fuller just nodded. Nebe indicated Wilson with his finger. ‘This is him,’ he told Fuller. ‘Herr Wilson, this is CIA agent Sam Fuller, and...’
‘General Samford,’ Fuller confirmed. ‘Head of US Intelligence.’
‘I believe you wanted a talk,’ Samford said, sounding like a man suppressing anger. ‘Well, here I am.’
‘Are you nervous, General?’
‘What?’
‘You’ve brought a lot of armed troops to what I’d hoped would be an informal, friendly meeting.’
‘I don’t have friendly meetings with escaped war criminals. Nor do I like traitorous Americans and their Nazi cohorts.’
Wilson was amused. ‘You wrong me. I’m not a man who changes sides. I’ve always been exactly what I am, which is a man on his own. I can’t be a traitor, because I’ve never been a patriot. I go where my work takes me, General Samford, whether it’s here, Nazi Germany, or the Antarctic. You’re a soldier, General. I’m a scientist. That’s the only difference between us.’
‘You’re just a goddamned Nazi,’ Samford said. ‘You and your whole bunch.’
‘I am not, and never have been, a Nazi, General Samford. I have no political allegiances, no religion, no belief in any government, left or right. I live for my work, which is science, as you live for the army. You’ve chosen what you want to be, General, and I’ve done the same. We’re two sides of the same coin.’
General Samford was obviously outraged by the very suggestion, but before he could explode, Fuller said soothingly, ‘Okay, you’ve got us both here, Wilson. Now what do you want?’
‘Can I take it you’re both here with the full knowledge of the head of the Air Matériel Command?’
‘General Vandenberg knows we’re here,’ Samford said, practically gritting his teeth. ‘Now what do you *want*?’
‘We want to trade,’ Wilson said.

For a moment even Fuller looked dumbfounded, but General Samford could barely contain himself.
‘*What*?’ he asked, as if choking on a bone.
‘You heard me,’ Wilson said. ‘As you clearly know, we’re not the only ones with flying saucers, though ours are certainly the most advanced. The US and Canada are both involved in similar construction projects and have already had plenty of test flights. The Harold Dahl and Kenneth Arnold sightings of June 1947, over the Cascades, were actually of crude US-Canadian saucers being constructed in secret in the wilds of Canada. Your saucers, General Samford, not ours. But no matter how long you take or how much you spend, your saucers can never be that advanced without further knowledge of my technology. I, too, have certain needs, General, so I’m willing to trade.’
‘I don’t – ’
‘Why would you do that?’ Fuller interjected, his gaze ever watchful and direct. ‘I mean, that would be inviting our technology to catch up with yours, and then...’ He shrugged and grinned. ‘We’d be evenly matched. Then we’d come in and get you.’
Wilson was unperturbed. ‘Not quite true, Mr Fuller. In return for what I need, I’ll trade certain secrets of my technology, but I’ll be doing it a little at a time and only when I’ve already surpassed what I’m offering to you. Though this will benefit you greatly, you’ll always remain behind us, which ensures that we’ll retain the technological advantages we have at this time.’
‘A balance of power,’ Samford said.
‘You might call it that,’ Wilson replied.
‘A seesaw arrangement, right? A tricky manoeuvre.’
‘That’s right, Mr Fuller.’
‘And just what are we supposed to hand over for all this?’ Samford asked, still sounding choked.
‘I’m in constant need of various mass-produced components and equipment, as well as food and other supplies. We shipped a tremendous amount of it in throughout the war years, but it’s finally beginning to run out and our saucers are not yet large enough to bring in the bulk we need. You’ll do that for us.’
General Samford was red-faced, clenching and unclenching his fists, but Fuller seemed merely intrigued. ‘If we do that for you,’ he pointed out, ‘we’ll find out exactly where you are.’

‘I don’t care,’ Wilson said. ‘That information won’t help you. You can’t get conventional aircraft anywhere near us and your saucers have a long way to go before they can be used to combat us, either with troops or with weapons.’
‘So if we can’t get in with conventional aircraft, how will we get the supplies to you?’
‘We’re located at the base of a deep, hidden gorge in Neu Schwabenland, or Queen Maud Land, which isn’t accessible by conventional aircraft. You’ll be given a location at the other side of that mountain range. There we’ve already hacked storage spaces out of the base of the mountain and will soon have them manned all year round. You’ll drop the supplies, and we’ll then pick them up and transport them back here in our saucers. As and when required.’
‘But eventually,’ Fuller said with a smile not reflected in his cold, steady gaze, ‘with the technological information you’ll be feeding us in return, bit by bit, our technology, if never quite matching yours, will be enough to give us saucers capable of flying down into your hidden base.’
‘By which time,’ Wilson replied, ‘we’ll have developed some highly advanced form of defence to keep out unwanted saucers - infrasound barriers or heat shields. We’re already working on those.’
‘You may not succeed,’ General Samford said hopefully, ‘in which case we could eventually get at you.’
‘That’s a chance I’m willing to take,’ Wilson said. ‘And I don’t take chances lightly.’ Samford and Fuller glanced at one another, the former outraged, the latter cynically amused.
‘What if we reject your proposal?’ Samford said. ‘Seems to me, we can just leave you in the Antarctic and forget your existence. A few saucers flying here and there aren’t going to give us much trouble. Most folks already think the saucers are piloted by Little Green Men or only witnessed by cranks. What can you do to us?’
‘Remember the Mantell crash?’ Nebe asked, breaking his icy silence. ‘The first US Air Force officer to die chasing a UFO?’
‘Yes,’ Samford said, ‘I remember. He either died chasing a Rawin weather balloon or because of a lack of oxygen when he foolishly climbed too high.’
‘It’s a well-known fact,’ Nebe said softly, chillingly, ‘that Mantell’s last words were about something metallic and tremendous in size. That was our saucer.’

Samford glanced at Fuller, then at Wilson. ‘I don’t believe you’re that far advanced,’ he said. ‘I think Mantell died from a lack of oxygen, maybe chasing Venus, so I’m calling your bluff.’
‘You reject my proposal?’ Wilson asked.
‘Yes.’
‘Then I’ll give you proof, General Samford. I’ll give you, the Pentagon and the White House the kind of proof you won’t readily forget. Later this month my flying saucers will surround Washington DC. Some will be piloted; others will be small, remotecontrolled devices of the kind called “Foo-fighters” during the war. For your entertainment, we’ll even fly around the White House. We’ll cause chaos on every radar screen in the area. If your aircraft try pursuing us, we’ll play cat-and-mouse with them. Should that not make you change your mind, we’ll repeat the performance a week later. I think, General Samford, that your superiors, including the President, will think differently after this demonstration.’
‘I’ll believe that when I see it,’ Samford said. ‘Now go to hell, Wilson.’
Wilson merely smiled and then returned with Nebe to the limousine. As he was slipping into the rear seat, he glanced back over his shoulder and saw Samford in angry consultation with Fuller. Fuller was shaking his head, as if saying, ‘No,’ but Samford was obviously overruling him. As Wilson closed his door, Samford shouted at the armed soldiers. Instantly, they readied their weapons and raced forward to surround the limousine.
‘Too late,’ Nebe said.
Suddenly, a great pyramid of dazzling light beamed down over the advancing soldiers. A bass humming sound, shaking even the limousine, was accompanied by a fierce, swirling wind that bent the trees on either side of the road and bowled the advancing soldiers over. Their weapons fell from their hands as they were swept across the road, bellowing with fear and pain as what seemed like a tornado slammed them into one another or against the trees.
Wilson caught a glimpse of General Samford crouching low, holding his peaked cap on with one hand, shading his eyes with the other, squinting up at that dazzling, descending, pyramidal light as Fuller tugged him back to their own car, just outside the roaring whirlpool of wind, now filled with flying leaves, blades of grass, pebbles and dust.
‘Let’s go!’ Nebe snapped.
The driver of the limousine reversed away from the tornado created by the

descending saucer and then headed back across the field. There, a second saucer, thirty foot in diameter, had descended and was resting on its four hydraulic legs, gleaming silvery in moonlight. The driver stopped about twenty yards from the parked saucer, letting Wilson and Nebe climb out, then he reversed again and bounced back across the field to the road.

The first saucer was now visible, hovering high in the sky, its base spinning and emitting that great pyramidal light, creating the hurricane-like wind that was slamming the soldiers against the trees or causing them to roll between them, across the grass verge beyond the road.

The limousine raced away as the dazzling light blinked out, abruptly returning the night to darkness. The saucer ascended vertically, rapidly, until it was just a pinprick of light positioned high in the sky, a single star amongst many. Eventually, the swirling wind settled down, letting the bruised, dazed soldiers stand upright again. They all looked up in awe as the second saucer, containing Wilson and Nebe, also ascended vertically, hovered briefly in the sky, then shot off at unreal speed, heading south before blinking out.

'We have a problem,' Fuller said.

Chapter Eleven

The telephone call came during supper. Nichola, now four years of age, still blonde and cuter than ever, was no longer in her high chair, but sitting instead with Dwight and Beth at the table, having cookies and milk while her parents contented themselves with coffee. It was the month of July in 1952. Though it was pretty late in the evening, the sun hadn't sunk yet and the velvet sky was streaked with pink where the stars didn't show. When the telephone rang, Beth stared at it but made no move to pick it up.

'Okay,' Dwight said, feeling guilty and tense when he saw the look on her face. 'It's for me, right? I'll get it.' Though Beth was sitting beside the phone, he got up and walked around the table to pick it up, which placed him practically against her shoulder and made her lean away from him. 'Hi,' he said. 'Cap'n Randall.'

'Hate to call at this time of night,' Bob Jackson said, 'but you have to come over here.

They want you right now.'

'Over where? To the ATIC?'

'Yeah, right. That's where I'm calling from. They want you immediately.'

'Who the hell are *they*?'

‘Members of the Technical Intelligence Division, Air Matériel Command. They want
to talk to you about what we’ve been doing since Project Sign was dissolved and replaced with Project Grudge.’

Even though now well prepared for the unexpected, Dwight was astounded at this. ‘Now? At *this* time?’

‘Yeah. They got me out of bed. They appear to have a very urgent need for some detailed case histories. They’ve also come to discuss your complaints about how they’ve been treating us.’

‘Shit!’

‘No shit, baby.’

‘Okay,’ Dwight said, ‘I’m coming.’ He dropped the phone and and stared at Beth, trying to hold her gaze, though he couldn’t help shrugging forlornly. ‘Top brass. I swear, Beth, I wasn’t expecting this. Apparently they want to interview me - right now, in the ATIC. They’re waiting over there for me.’

‘Right now? This evening?’

‘Unbelieveable, right?’

Nichola was breaking up a couple of cookies and spreading the crumbs out on the table.

‘Why don’t you tell them to go to hell? Tell them you have a right to your own life, even if in the Air Force.’

‘I can’t, Beth. It’s top brass.’

‘That doesn’t give them the right. Lord knows, they’re working you into the ground already; you have a right to your own time.’

‘It must be something special, Beth.’

‘Oh, yeah,’ she replied. ‘Something special. Every time we try to plan something, get together, something special comes up. This marriage won’t last the course, Dwight.’

‘Bullshit.’

‘No, it’s not. You work night and day for those people and get no thanks for it. They’ve even consistently denied you promotion, which is practically punishment. So what’s the point, Dwight?’

Not knowing what to say, Dwight glanced down at his daughter. She was licking her index finger and drawing funny faces in the crumbs from the cookies, her brow wrinkled in deep thought. She was also whispering words he couldn’t hear and perhaps wouldn’t understand.

‘Promotion’s not the point,’ Dwight said. ‘I do this because it’s my job and

that’s all there is to it.’
‘Promotion may not be the point, but punishment is. They’ve consistently denied you promotion and you know why that is. It’s the UFOs, Dwight. They don’t approve of what you’re doing. It’s a pure PR exercise and someone had to be landed with it. You got the job, but they don’t want you to succeed and so they’re making it hard on you. God, Dwight, you’re a fool!’
Dwight knew it was true. He just didn’t know the reasons. On the one hand, the UFOs were treated as a threat to national security, on the other the reporting of them was discouraged. It just didn’t make sense. No more than it made sense to establish a UFO programme and then block every move its members made. Beth was right - it was a goddamned PR exercise... and maybe he was the fall guy. He might find out tonight. After kissing Nichola on the head, making her giggle and squirm, he went to the closet and pulled out his light jacket. He was wearing civilian clothes, his home clothes, and didn’t intend changing into his uniform at this time of night. Let the bastards see that at least. Putting his jacket on, he went to the door, opened it, but then turned back to Beth.
‘I used to count on your support,’ he told her, ‘but these days I only get flak. What happened, Beth?’
‘You traded me in for your work.’
He stared steadily at her, feeling hurt, then stepped out onto the porch, letting the door snap shut behind him. The pink sky was turning darker, letting the stars come out, and he stood there for a moment, gazing across the airstrip, taking comfort from the aircraft hangars and the many parked planes silhouetted in the twilight. Seeing them, he was reminded of how much simpler life had been when he’d been flying the B-29s over India, China and the Pacific during World War II. Now the US was fighting a war in Korea. Dwight sometimes wished he could take part in it, instead of remaining here to chase UFOs and dodge flak that came from his superiors and Beth instead of the enemy. Sighing, still feeling wounded and hurt, he started down the steps to the yard.
The door opened and snapped shut behind him, then he heard Beth call out to him. When he turned back, she hurried down the steps to cup his face in her hands.
‘Oh, honey,’ she said, shaking her head in a woeful manner and letting her thumbs slide down to his lips, ‘I’m so sorry. I really am. It’s not you,

sweetheart – it's what they're doing to us. To *us*. The three of us. We're a family, a good family, a team, and they could tear us apart. That's what frightens me, Dwight.'

'There's no need,' he replied. 'There's no danger of that, Beth.' He removed one of her hands from his cheek and pressed his lips to it, moved by a rush of emotion that brought tears to his eyes. 'We'll be okay. I promise.'

'I worry,' she insisted. 'There's more than one kind of danger. There's the threat to this marriage – that's one - but we're okay if we know that. What we can't fight, what I think we can't defeat, is what happens to so many of those who do the work that you do. That's what worries me most, Dwight.'

He knew what she meant and was troubled to be reminded of it. Too many Air Force officers involved in UFO investigations ended up with career problems, broken marriages and ill health. Too many were denied promotion, punished for cooked-up misdemeanours, or posted to inhospitable climes, often separated from their families. Too many for comfort. Beth had cause for anxiety.

'I love you,' she said. 'You know that, honey. I'm just concerned for you.'

'I love you, too, Beth, but I can't help your concern.'

She sighed. 'No, I guess not. I'll just have to be stronger. We're a family, right, Dwight?'

'Yeah,' he said. 'A real family.'

'Then that's all that matters.' She embraced him and kissed him, clinging passionately to him, then let him go and wiped tears from her eyes. 'You hurry on, now. Take no mind of me. I'll be warming the bed, Dwight.'

'That sounds nice.' He turned away, wiping his own eyes, and hurried along the sidewalk, now deserted at this late hour, past the other houses of the officers quarters, heading for Wright Field, not looking forward to the meeting, but protected by Beth's love.

Chapter Twelve

The atmosphere in the ATIC operation's room was decidedly tense. Three US Air Force generals were sitting around Dwight's desk, all with thick wallet folders in front of them. Dwight's friend, Captain Bob Jackson, had placed a second chair beside Dwight's, behind the desk, and was sitting in it, facing the three generals. Seeing Dwight, he stood up and introduced him to generals Lamont, Conroy and Hackleman. After exchanging salutes, Dwight took the chair beside Bob, facing the generals over his own, paperlittered desk.

A brief, uncomfortable silence ensued, until General Hackleman, silvery-haired, deeply suntanned and lined, coughed into his clenched fist, clearing his throat, then said, ‘Sorry to call you out at this time of night, Cap’n, but this matter is urgent.’

‘Yes, sir,’ Dwight said.

‘It’s come to our attention that contrary to air force policy, as laid down for Project Grudge, you’ve been openly supporting the UFO hypothesis and insisting that you have evidence for the physical reality of the phenomenon.’

‘I think it’s important, sir. And I should remind you that Project Grudge was replaced in April by Project Blue Book, for which there’s a more positive policy.’

‘I know all that,’ General Lamont said testily, ‘but we still want to hear what evidence you’re basing your assumptions on.’

‘Analysis of the photos of UFOs, done in the specialist Photo Reconnaissance Laboratory, here at Wright Field, have confirmed the saucer-shaped configuration of the sighted UFOs.’

‘We know all that as well,’ Lamont interrupted rudely. ‘We’ve seen the photographic evidence. But what makes you think they’re real, solid objects?’

Dwight refused to be bullied. ‘With the saucer-shaped configuration and manoeuvring capabilities of the UFOs verified, what was needed was confirmation of what appeared to be their unusually large size and remarkable top speeds, as well as the fact that they appear to be able to hover, almost motionless, in the air. Regarding this, we received a report from Navy Commander R.B. McLaughlin, who’d worked throughout 1948 and 1949 with a team of engineers, technicians and scientists on a classified Skyhook balloon project, located in the Navy’s top-secret guided-missile test and development area in the White Sands Proving Ground, New Mexico.’

Dwight took his time leafing through one of his wallet folders, before pulling out a report and speaking while glancing repeatedly at it. ‘According to that report, on April 24, 1949, at ten hundred hours in an absolutely clear Sunday morning, when McLaughlin and his team were preparing to launch one of their big Skyhook balloons - a hundred feet in diameter - the whole crew saw a UFO which, though high up, was clearly elliptical in shape and had a whitish-silver colour.’

‘Could have been another Skyhook balloon,’ Hackleman said. ‘Or maybe even Venus.’

‘No, sir,’ Dwight replied. ‘Neither. With a theodolite, stop-watch, and 25-power telescope, Commander McLaughlin’s team was able to track the UFO as it dropped from an angle of elevation of forty-five degrees to twenty-five degrees, then abruptly shot upward and disappeared. Even after putting a reduction factor on the data recorded on the theodolite, Commander McLaughlin estimated that the UFO was approximately forty feet wide and a hundred feet long, had been at an altitude of fifty-six miles, and was travelling at approximately 2,000 miles per hour.’

‘That’s impossible!’ General Conroy snapped angrily.

‘I’ll admit, sir, that there’s some legitimate doubt regarding the accuracy of the speed and altitude figures that Commander McLaughlin’s team arrived at from the data they measured with the theodolite. This, however, doesn’t mean much in the sense that even if they were off by a factor of one hundred per cent, the speeds and altitude of the UFO would be extraordinary. I’d also remind you that various members of McLaughlin’s team studied the object through a 25-power telescope and swore that it was a flat, ovalshaped object.’

‘And I’d remind *you*, Cap’n Randall, that Commander McLaughlin had no right to release that report, let alone write the article he published in *True* magazine in March the following year. Small wonder he’s been transferred back to sea.’

‘With all due respect, sir, matters of naval discipline are not my concern. I was sent the report to read and analyze, which is just what I’ve done. In my view it confirms that the UFOs, or flying saucers, can fly at extraordinary speeds and reach remarkable altitudes.’

‘You say these cinetheodolite cameras aren’t always accurate,’ General Conroy said. ‘Just what are they and how do you use them, Cap’n?’

‘A cinetheodolite is similar to a 35-mm movie camera, except that when a moving object is photographed with it, the developed photograph will also contain three readings that show the time the photo was taken, the azimuth angle, and the elevation angle of the camera. If two or more cinetheodolites photograph the same flying object, it’s possible to obtain rough estimates of the object’s size, speed and altitude. I stress *rough* estimates because cinetheodolites don’t give accurate readings.’

‘Nevertheless, you insist that the UFO tracked by McLaughlin’s team was moving remarkably fast.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘How fast?’
‘A lot faster than any jet plane we know about.’
The generals glanced uneasily at one another, then returned their attention to Dwight. ‘Okay, Cap’n, that accounts for configuration and speed. What’s convinced you that these craft are real, solid objects?’
‘Two incidents.’ Dwight glanced at Bob, received a slight, knowing smile, then flipped over more pages in his folder and spoke as he read. ‘On April 27, 1950, shortly after a guided missile had been fired from the White Sands Proving Ground in New Mexico and fell back to earth, the camera crews of Air Force technicians spotted an object streaking across the sky. As most of the camera stations had already unloaded their film, only one camera was able to catch a shot of the UFO before it disappeared. That photo showed only a dark, smudgy object - but it also proved that whatever it was, it had been *moving*. A month later, during a second missile test, another UFO appeared. This time, two members of the camera teams saw it and shot several feet of film as the - quote - bright, shiny object - unquote - streaked across the sky. That film was subsequently processed and analysed by the Data Reduction Group at White Sands. By putting a correction factor in the data gathered by the two cameras, they were able to calculate that the object was higher than 40,000 feet, travelling over 2,000 miles per hour, and was approximately 300 feet in diameter.’ Dwight looked each of the generals in the eye. ‘I concede that these figures are only estimates, based on the possibly erroneous correction factor. However, they certainly prove that *something* had been in the air and it had been *solid* and moving very fast.’
‘Enough to convince you of the reality of the phenomenon,’ General Conroy said drily.
‘Yes, sir. In combination with the two major flaps that came the following year: the Lubbock Lights and the Fort Monmouth sightings.’
Again the three generals stared at one another, this time even more uneasily. When General Hackleman turned back to Dwight, his hazel eyes were troubled.
‘Ah, yes,’ he said. ‘We were informed that you’d investigated both cases personally. Kindly give us your report on both events. In precise detail, Cap’n.’
Dwight began to feel nervous. This was no casual interrogation. These three senior officers were concerned at what he knew and obviously not pleased with the extent of his knowledge. Nevertheless, they were demanding a

detailed report, so, after glancing nervously at the equally concerned Bob Jackson, he picked up another file.
‘The Lubbock affair,’ he read, ‘began on the evening of August 25, 1951, when an employee of the Atomic Energy Commission’s supersecret Sandia Corporation – ’
‘Who?’ General Lamont asked abruptly.
‘I’m sorry, sir, I can’t reveal that. I can only say that he had a top “Q” security clearance.’
The generals glanced uneasily at one another. ‘Okay,’ Lamont said. ‘Continue.’
‘This Sandia employee looked up from his garden on the outskirts of Albuquerque, New Mexico, and saw a huge aircraft flying swiftly and *silently* over his home. He later described it as having the shape of a flying wing, about one-and-a-half times the size of a B-26, with six to eight softly glowing, bluish lights on its aft end.’
General Lamont coughed into his clenched fist.
‘That same evening,’ Dwight continued, ‘about twenty minutes after this sighting, four professors from the Texas Technological College at Lubbock – a geologist, a chemist, a physicist, and a petroleum engineer - observed a formation of lights streaking across the sky: about fifteen to thirty separate lights, all a bluish-green colour, moving from north to south in a semicircular formation.’
‘You can’t name the four professors either,’ Conroy said sardonically. ‘No, sir, I’m afraid not.’
‘Keep reading, Cap’n.’
‘Early in the morning of August 26, only a few hours after the Lubbock sightings, two different radars at an Air Defence Command radar station located in Washington State showed an unknown target travelling at 900 miles an hour at 1,300 feet and heading in a northwesterly direction. On August 31, at the height of the flap, two ladies were driving near Matador, seventy miles northeast of Lubbock, when they saw a pear-shaped object about 150 yards ahead of them, about 120 feet in the air, drifting slowly to the east at less than the take-off speed of a Cub airplane. One of those witnesses was familiar with aircraft - she was married to an air force officer and had lived on or near air bases for years - and she swore that the object was about the size of a B-29 fuselage, had a porthole on one side, made absolutely no noise as it moved *into* the wind, and suddenly picked up speed

and climbed out of sight in a tight, spiralling motion. That same evening, an amateur photographer, Carl Hart, Jr., took five photos of a V formation of the same bluish-green lights as they flew over his back yard. Finally, a rancher's wife told her husband, who related the story to me, that she had seen a large object gliding swiftly and silently over her house. That object was observed about ten minutes after the Sandia Corporation executive had viewed *his* object. It was described as – I quote – "an airplane without a body". The woman said there were pairs of glowing lights on its aft edge - an exact description of the Albuquerque sightings made by the Sandia employee.'

'Who cannot be named,' General Conroy emphasised sardonically.

Dwight just smiled, then glanced down at his report. 'Subsequent investigation by myself and Captain Jackson' - he nodded in Bob's direction – 'confirmed that the Washington State radar lock-on had been a solid target - not a weather target. We then calculated that an object flying between that radar station and Lubbock would have been on a northwesterly course at the time it was seen at the two places - and that it would have had a speed of approximately 900 miles per hour, as calculated by the radar.'

'Still doesn't prove that much,' General Hackleman insisted with what seemed like a glimmer of hope.

'No,' Dwight said. 'But the five photographs taken by Carl Hart, Jr. were analysed by our Photo Reconnaissance Laboratory. The results showed that the lights, in an inverted V formation, had crossed about 120 degrees of open sky at a 30-degree per second angular velocity. This corresponded exactly to the angular velocity measured carefully by the four professors from the Technical College at Lubbock. Analysis of the photos also showed that the lights were a great deal brighter than the surrounding stars and that their unusual intensity could have been caused by an exceptionally bright light source which had a colour at the most distant red end of the spectrum, bordering on infrared.'

'What does that mean, Cap'n?' Hackleman's hazel gaze, which was steady, was also too concerned for Dwight's comfort.

'As the human eye isn't sensitive to such a light,' Dwight explained, 'the light could appear dim to the eye - as many of the Lubbock lights did - but be exceptionally bright on film, as they were on the photographs. While according to the Photo Reconnaissance Laboratory, at that time there was nothing flying that had those particular characteristics, I was pretty startled

to discover that the lights on the photos were strikingly similar to those described by the Atomic Energy Commission employee as being on the aft edge of the huge UFO that passed silently over his house.'

'So *did* something solid pass over Albuquerque, New Mexico,' Hackleman asked, 'and fly 250 miles to Lubbock, Texas, at an approximate speed of 900 miles per hour?'

'Yes, sir. According to the witnesses, and to the radar and visual-tracking calculations, it did. The Lubbock files were also studied by a group of rocket experts, nuclear physicists and intelligence experts, and they were all convinced that the sightings had been of an enormous, solid object, most probably with a highly swept-back wing configuration and a series of small jet orifices around its edge.'

There was silence for a moment while the three generals studied Dwight, none of them appearing too friendly, all looking concerned. Then General Hackleman let out a loud sigh. 'So,' he said. 'Who ordered you to personally investigate the Lubbock lights?' 'Major General C.P. Cabell, sir, representing the Director of Intelligence of the Air Force. In a matter of hours of receiving the order, Captain Jackson and I were on an airplane to Lubbock. Once there, we worked around the clock, interrogating everyone involved in the sighting - pilots, radar operators, technicians and instructors. What they told us substantiated the sighting reports.'

'We appreciate the thoroughness of the written report,' General Hackleman said, though displaying impatience. 'Who did you personally report to before writing it up?'

'General Cabell - naturally - and other high-ranking intelligence officers in the Pentagon, where the meeting took place.'

'You reported verbally?'

'Yes, sir.'

'That's what we'd been told,' General Hackleman said. 'But we couldn't find the recording of that meeting.'

Dwight glanced at Bob, who was looking uneasier every minute.

'Every word of that meeting was recorded,' Dwight insisted.

'But the recording was destroyed shortly after,' General Hackleman said. 'At least, so we were informed by the CIA.'

'But - '

'It doesn't matter,' General Conroy interjected. 'Don't bother asking, Cap'n. There are good reasons for everything, I'm sure. Now what about the

replacement of Project Grudge with Project Blue Book in April this year, with Captain Ruppelt in command? Did you resent being downgraded to second-in-command?'

'I wouldn't be human if I didn't, sir.' Dwight was feeling hot and embarrassed. More so because this very subject had caused more friction between him and Beth, who was convinced that officers involved in UFO investigations always had a hard time from the Air Force and were often consistently denied promotion. Thus, when Project Grudge had been dropped and replaced with Project Blue Book, with Dwight reduced to secondin-command under Captain Edward J. Ruppelt, Dwight's acute disappointment had only been exacerbated by Beth's angry insistence that his 'virtual demotion' was another sign that he should ask to be transferred to another, less controversial, line of work. 'But I should emphasise,' Dwight now insisted to General Conroy, 'that Captain Ruppelt and I have an excellent working relationship.'

'So Ruppelt has confirmed,' Conroy said with a slight, mocking smile. 'However, to change the subject slightly, do you think the stir caused by the Lubbock sightings was responsible for the replacement of Grudge with Blue Book?'

'The Lubbock sightings certainly helped, sir, but they weren't totally responsible. Though those sightings certainly made the Air Force sit up and take notice, it was the ones that took place a month later that really led to the formation of Project Blue Book.'

'The ones that took place at the Army Signal Corps radar centre at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.'

'Yes, sir.'

'A top-secret establishment.'

'Exactly, sir.'

'Tell us about those,' General Conroy said.

Dwight opened another file. 'The flap began at 11.10 in the morning of September 10, 1951, when a student operator was giving a demonstration of automatic radar tracking to a group of visiting top brass – sorry: senior officers.' General Conroy gave a wintry smile, but said nothing, so Dwight, flustered, glanced down at his notes and continued reading. 'After spotting an object flying about 12,000 yards southeast of the station, the operator switched to automatic tracking, but failed to hold the object. In his confusion, he blurted out to the visiting officers that the object was going too

fast for the radar set - which meant that it was flying faster than any known jet. After three minutes, during which the UFO continued to fly too fast for the automatic radar tracking, it disappeared.'

'The weather?' General Lamont asked.

'Checks with the weather department revealed that there were no indications of a temperature inversion.'

'Okay, Cap'n, continue.'

'Twenty-five minutes later, the pilot of a T-33 jet trainer, carrying an Air Force major as passenger and flying 20,000 feet over Mount Pleasant, New Jersey, observed a dull, silver, disk-like object below him. It was thirty to fifty feet in diameter. When the object descended towards Sandy Hook, the T-33 pilot went after it. As he approached the object, it stopped abruptly, hovered impossibly, suddenly sped south, then made a 120-degree turn and vanished out to sea.'

Dwight glanced up from his report, surprised at how breathless and nervous he was. 'The Air Force major in the T-33 confirmed that sighting.' When no one passed comment, he avoided the three pairs of eyes by looking back at his notes.

'At 3.15pm, back at the Fort Monmouth radar centre, a frantic call was received from headquarters, demanding that they pick up an unknown that was flying very high, to the north, roughly where the first UFO had vanished. A radar lock-on confirmed that the UFO was travelling - I quote - *slowly*, at 93,000 feet - or eighteen miles above the earth - and it could also be made out visually as a silver speck.'

'No known aircraft of today can fly eighteen miles above the earth,' Bob said, speaking for the first time.

'Thank you for that observation, Cap'n Jackson,' General Conroy said dryly. 'Okay, Cap'n Randall, continue.'

Giving Bob a fleeting grin, Dwight said, 'Next morning two radar sets picked up another unknown that climbed, levelled out, dived and climbed again repeatedly, too fast for the automatic radar tracking. When the object climbed, it went almost straight up. The flap ended that afternoon when the radar picked up another slowly moving UFO and tracked it for several minutes, before it, too, disappeared.'

He looked up from his notes. 'Those sightings were witnessed by all the visiting VIPs and it was they who really got the ball rolling. So, it was the Monmouth sightings, even more than the Lubbock lights, that compelled

Major Cabell to order the ATIC to establish a new, more serious UFO investigation project. Subsequently, in April, Project Grudge was renamed Project Blue Book.'

'And in contradiction to the policy of Project Grudge,' General Hackleman said, 'Project Blue Book is to work on the assumption that the UFOs, or flying saucers, are real, solid objects.'

'Yes, sir,' Dwight said, sweating too much, his heart beating too fast. When he closed the file, he noticed that his hands were shaking. Not much, but definitely shaking, which really surprised him.

There was a lengthy, tense silence, then General Hackleman leaned forward in his chair and said, 'Anything else, Cap'n?'

Dwight glanced at Bob and was given a nod of approval to state what they had both been frightened of reporting. 'Yes, sir,' Dwight said. 'The pattern and nature of a recent build-up of sightings of fiery discs, green fireballs, and large flying saucers, over the past month, along the East Coast, indicates something damned scary.'

'Oh?' The general's gaze was steady and intense. 'What's that, Cap'n Randall?'

Dwight took a deep breath, hardly believing he was going to say it, then let his words come out on a rush of air.

'It seems like some kind of UFO invasion,' he said, 'and it's closing in on Washington D.C.'

The silence stretched out forever.

Chapter Thirteen

The sun was dying. Wilson knew this as he stood in a field of wheat in Montezuma, Iowa, the stalks shoulder-high around him, and gazed across that yellow field to where green fields met blue sky, then squinted up into the sun's striations, which were silvery and ravishing. Wilson was only ten years old, blond-haired and tanned, but even as the sun's heat scorched his face, he knew the sun was dying. It would take a long time, but die it surely would, and when it died, the earth would die with it, destroying the great hope of mankind. Wilson, though still a child, was overwhelmed by that knowledge and decided, there and then, without a moment's hesitation, that he had to do something to save mankind and ensure its continuance.

Man's destiny, he was convinced, could only be changed through science and the evolution of a new kind of man, one less prone to mortality.

Even then, as a boy growing up in Iowa, born of God-fearing parents, but

unable to accept the idea of Him, Wilson had been convinced that mankind would eventually have to leave Earth and inhabit another, less endangered planet. To do so, he would have to create an extraordinary technology; he would also have to transcend his still primitive nature and escape the physical limitations of his weak, mortal body.

Man would have to turn himself into Superman and then reach for the stars. Wilson realised this at ten years old as he squinted up at the sun over Iowa... Then he awakened, at eighty-two, to look out over the vast, snow-covered wilderness of Antarctica from his bed near the summit of a mountain in Neu Schwabenland.

Though still groggy from anaesthetics, the dream, or recollection, had filled him with the awareness of how fragile was mortality and how ephemeral each individual life. From childhood to old age had taken no time at all - the past was virtually in the present
- and now he knew with more certainty than ever that no matter what he did to himself, his time would be limited.

Nevertheless, there was still a lot he could do before it ended, so he had to keep that dark moment at bay as long as humanly, or scientifically, possible.

For this reason, he had become his own laboratory animal, experimenting constantly on himself, with the aid of his two specialists: Professor Adolf Eckhardt, a former Nazi concentration camp experimental surgeon, and the abducted Dr Paul Gold, formerly of the Powered Limbs Unit of West Hendon Hospital, London. Freed from the moral, ethical and religious constraints of Western surgical research, they were producing between them some extraordinary innovations in prosthetics, organ replacement and skin grafts.

After having some of the latter done successfully to his face and hands, thus making him look sixty instead of eighty-two, Wilson had recently had his weakening heart replaced with the first of Eckhardt’s prosthetics and was already recovering from the operation.

Sitting upright on the bed and breathing deeply, letting the cold air clear his head, he called on the phone for Eckhardt and Gold to come up immediately. He also asked for Hans Kammler and Artur Nebe to come up thirty minutes later, in order to submit their latest reports.

Eckhardt and Gold entered together, both wearing white smocks, and stood one at each side of Wilson’s bed, smiling down at him. Once devoted to his

wife and children in London, Gold was now devoted only to his work in this Antarctic colony and content to take his pleasures with the ‘comfort girls’ abducted by the flying saucer crews from all over the Earth. He was completely reliable. Eckhardt, of course, being a fugitive war criminal, still wanted by the British, not to mention the Jews of Israel, for his so-called ‘anthropological’ experiments in the Nazi concentration camps, clearly had no place else to go. Nevertheless, he also was delighted to be able to continue his experiments without restraint in the colony’s laboratories, using animals and the human abductees being held in appalling conditions in the dank, freezing underground cells. He, too, took his pleasures from the comfort girls and was obsessed with his work.

‘So,’ he said, lowering his stethoscope to examine Wilson’s heartbeat, ‘you look good. How do you feel?’

‘Excellent,’ Wilson said.

Eckhardt listened to Wilson’s heartbeat, then straightened up. ‘Perfect.’

‘It doesn’t feel perfect,’ Wilson replied. ‘It’s a little uncomfortable.’

‘We’ll soon improve on it.’ Eckhardt was unfazed by Wilson’s cold stare, having known him since the early days in Nazi Germany, way back in 1940, before the dream of the Thousand Year Reich had collapsed into ruins.

As Wilson well knew, Eckhardt and other Nazis were convinced that their Aryan dreams would be resurrected here, which is why they stayed on without persuasion. Wilson knew differently, but was not about to correct them, as he needed to use their insane faith for his own, infinitely more rational, purposes. He also needed them to help in extending his life, even if not indefinitely, as they were doing with his artificial heart and various joint and minor organ replacements.

Wilson’s new heart, or pacemaker, was a highly advanced device which, utilizing a piezoelectric crystal and a small balloon filled with water, caused the heart’s own pumping to stimulate itself. First created in crude form in Nazi Germany, but recently perfected here in the colony’s laboratories, it was more advanced than the one inserted for the first time in a human being in Pennsylvania Hospital, Philadelphia, a few months ago. That recipient, a 41-year old steelworker, had only lived for eighty minutes after his heart replacement, but Wilson would survive a lot longer.

‘The water-filled balloon,’ Eckhardt explained, ‘will be replaced with something smaller in a few months. Though the pacemaker is already maintenance free and doesn’t require batteries, we’ll eventually replace it

with a plutonium power source, or nuclear battery, which will weigh practically nothing and last longer. As for the rest of you, that's up to Dr Gold here.'

Eckhardt smiled thinly, without affection, at Dr Gold, whom he viewed as a rival for Wilson's attention. Gold, who despised Professor Eckhardt, politely ignored his smile. 'Your arthritic problems have been cured with joint replacements,' he said, 'but already we have more advanced prosthetics, if you're willing to – '

'Yes,' Wilson interjected without a pause. 'I am. The operations don't bother me.'

'Good.' Gold smiled like a normal doctor with a normal patient, as if still in the West Hendon Hospital, London, not here in a hidden Antarctic colony from which he would never escape. 'At the moment we're experimenting with artificial knees and elbows of clear acrylic resin reinforced with stainless steel. As for the joints themselves, the main problems have always been corrosion and lubrication, but soon I'll be removing your relatively crude, temporary stainless steel prosthetics and inserting more durable, maintenance-free, one-hundred percent mobile joints made of a corrosion-free, easily lubricated, more durable cobalt-chromium alloy. As most of the surgical work on your joints was done for the original replacements, the operations for the insertion of the new prosthetics will be relatively simple.'

'And the rest of me?'

Gold shrugged and raised his hands as if pleading for clemency. 'These are early days yet, but with human laboratory subjects instead of only animals we should certainly progress quicker than anyone else. That heart will buy you a few more years, but problems with your kidneys and lungs will come soon enough, which is why we're working on those right now.'

'Tell me.'

'Regarding your kidneys, we're experimenting with something first devised by a Dutch surgeon, Wilhelm Kolff, and tested, ironically, on a Nazi collaborator. This involves the use of cellulose acetate film as the filter membrane and heparin as the anticoagulant. Already we have an advanced version that we think will work, but we also need to find a means of circulating your blood from time to time through the artificial kidney. A cumbersome dialysis machine has been devised, but to avoid having to keep you plugged into it twenty-four hours a day we're working on a six-inch socket that can be permanently implanted in your circulatory system,

between an artery and vein, then opened and joined to the artificial kidney. What we've come up with is a sixinch tube of silicone rubber, tipped with polytetrafluoroethylene - an unreactive plastic - with ends that penetrate the skin and are stitched to the adjoining artery and vein. While causing you little discomfort, this will allow you to leave the large dialysis machine for days at a time. Eventually, we hope to have a self-sustaining artificial kidney, but that, alas, will take longer to develop.'

'And my lungs?'

'As those are essentially mechanical, we're looking into prosthetic replacements. However, as the lung is also a membrane of unusually high permeability and, more complex, roughly the area of a tennis court, we need to find a means of imitating it within the confines of the thorax. We hope to do this with a membrane of exceptionally thin silicone - say, one-thousandth of an inch thick - and with a maximum area of one square metre. This will be placed in the thorax in concentric layers, kept apart and selfsupported in a manner that forms minute channels, which in turn form the new blood capillaries. Unfortunately, in this case, the problems are many and the death rate during experiments is high. This is due mainly to our inability, so far, to prevent the artificial membrane from becoming choked by coagulated blood. Nevertheless, I'm convinced that with time, patience, and unimpeded human experimentation, we can produce the required anticoagulant. Then the artificial, implantable lung will be within reach.'

'Good,' Wilson said. He spent a few more minutes discussing the various surgical and medical experiments going on with the abducted humans held in the underground cells, then dismissed his two professors and waited for the arrival of administrator Hans Kammler and chief of security Artur Nebe, both former members of the Death's Head SS. Kammler arrived first, wearing a black coverall, still blond and handsome, but no longer the golden young god of war, now visibly ageing. He took a seat by the bed and nodded at Wilson, not smiling at all.

'You're recovering well?' he asked.

'Yes, Hans. No problems at all. I'll soon be on my feet again. So how is Ernst Stoll settling into Paraguay?'

Kammler smiled frostily. 'With no great deal of joy, but with dedication - as you had expected. He's greatly increased the defences of the compound, constructed a landing pad for the saucers, and set up a line of communication between himself and General Stroessner, whom be believes will eventually

take over as President. As Stroessner is infinitely corruptible, this is all to the good. We will certainly be well protected there.'
'Apart from that, is he doing what he's been sent there for?'
'Yes. The mass abduction of Ache Indians has begun with the aid of General Stroessner's *Federales*. For this, Stroessner is being well paid. Stoll claims that Stroessner is using the money to bribe senior army officers and seduce the heads of the Colorado Party. He's buying their support in his bid for the presidency and plans to make his move this year or next.'
'Excellent. We need a man like Stroessner in charge. We also need the Ache Indians - the females as comfort girls and servants, the males as conditioned pilots for the saucers and as experimental surgical fodder for Eckhardt and Gold. Since with even the abductions, we're running short of human material, a regular supply of the Ache will be truly invaluable.'
'I don't think Stoll will let you down.'
The door opened again and Artur Nebe entered, small and stout, as solid as a rock, with eyes as dark as his black coverall. His swarthy features, though revealing no emotion, concealed the soul of a monster. As he crossed to stand at the other side of the bed, facing Kammler, Wilson glanced through the panoramic window at the far side of the room and saw the vast, Antarctic wilderness, its soaring ice-covered peaks and snowcovered valleys stretching out to a dazzling, blue horizon. While the sheer, untouched beauty of it denied the horrors taking place daily in the laboratories and underground cells of this hidden colony, Wilson did not see it that way. Dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge – which, in his view, separated Man from beast - he was embarked on a crusade to redirect the evolution of mankind and turn the thinly disguised beast into Superman. There was no room for emotion in his grand design. His notion of beauty was absolute knowledge and the pure truths of science.
'So, Artur,' he said, looking up into Nebe's dark, fathomless gaze and taking confidence from the murderous well of his nature, 'what do you have to tell me?'
'Everything has gone smoothly. Exactly as we had planned. The calculated spreading of disinformation about UFOs has had the desired effect and is leading to confusion, not only with the public, but with military intelligence on a worldwide basis. By now, public opinion is split between those who believe the UFOs are of extraterrestrial origin, those who insist they're misinterpretations of natural atmospheric phenomena, those who deem them

the products of mass hallucination encouraged by too much talk about the subject, and those who believe they're the top-secret experimental craft of their own governments.'

'Official attitudes are equally confused?'

'Yes. The few government, military and intelligence heads who know of our existence here are so concerned about the possibility of public hysteria in the event that the news gets out, they've classified the subject top-secret. They've also classified as top-secret their own race to construct similar saucers in the vain hope of eventually getting us out of here. They're not only concerned with what they see as the new military threat represented by our technology, but by the fact that the Antarctic is Earth's last untapped treasure-house of oil, coal, gold, copper, uranium and, most important, water - the whole world will soon need water - and here we are, threatening to keep them out. So that's what concerns them most of all.'

'We can use that concern when we trade,' Wilson said. 'It's a strong card to hold. But apart from the stubborn General Samford, what do they think of our capability?'

'Deliberately letting the top brass of Fort Monmouth see one of our large saucers finally convinced the Pentagon of our vastly superior capability, though the White House, and Samford, remain unconvinced.'

'They soon will be,' Wilson said.

Nebe didn't return his smile, but continued speaking in his soft, oddly threatening monotone. 'The so-called Lubbock lights, which were in fact the lights on the tail end of an American-Canadian experimental flying wing constructed in secret at the White Sands Proving Ground, has further convinced the American public that alien craft are exploring the earth. The Lubbock lights - that flying wing - also succeeded in further confusing those in military intelligence who don't yet know of our existence and are baffled as to why their own superiors are trying to kill off the sighting reports, even as they insist that the saucers are a threat to national security.'

'We couldn't have done better ourselves,' Wilson observed.

'Finally,' Nebe continued, 'the concentrated build-up of flights of our mass-produced World War II *Feuerballs* over the east coast of the United States has been highly successful, leading to nationwide concern and numerous wild stories about green or orange fireballs and extraterrestrial flying saucers, as well as secret speculations in military circles about a forthcoming UFO invasion of the nation's capital.'

‘Perfect,’ Wilson said. ‘We’ll now proceed to do just that. We’ll surround Washington DC in general and the White House in particular with a virtual armada of *Feuerballs*. If that doesn’t persuade them the first time, we’ll repeat the performance a week later with even more *Feuerballs* and some larger, piloted saucers. I think it will work.’

‘When will it begin?’ Kammler asked him.

‘Time is of the essence,’ Wilson said. ‘The invasion commences tomorrow.’

Chapter Fourteen

Just off a flight from Dayton, Ohio, Dwight and Bob Jackson were passing a newspaper stand in the lobby of Washington National Airport Terminal Building when they were stopped dead in their tracks by the headline: INTERCEPTORS CHASE FLYING SAUCERS OVER WASHINGTON DC. Shocked, Dwight purchased the paper and read that the capital was in the middle of the biggest UFO flap of all time.

‘The bastards didn’t even tell us!’ he fumed, folding up the paper and jamming it into the side pocket of his Air Force jacket. ‘If we hadn’t come here on our own bat, they probably wouldn’t have called us. The biggest UFO flap of them all and we weren’t even informed!’

‘Come on,’ Bob said, swinging his briefcase from one hand to the other and heading energetically for the cab rank. ‘Let’s go and talk to Dewey Fournet.’

Instructing the cabbie to take them to the Pentagon, Dwight, still furious, opened the paper again and read the newspaper account of the present flap more carefully, tying the report to what he already knew. He was even more furious about not being informed because he had practically predicted that this flap would occur and, indeed, had informed generals Conroy, Lamont and Hackleman about it during his recent, unpleasant interrogation. The Air Force’s Project Blue Book was now going strong under the leadership of Captain Edward J. Ruppelt and had received more official UFO reports than it had done in any previous month in its history. In fact, according to Ruppelt, the sheer number of reports was making Air Force officers in the Pentagon frantic.

By June 15, the locations, timing, and sequence of the reports had indicated that the UFOs were gradually closing in on Washington DC.

Throughout the afternoon of June 15, reports of ‘round, shiny objects’ and ‘silvery spheres’ had come in from all over Virginia, one after the other: 3.40pm at Unionville; 4.20pm at Gordonsville; 4.25pm at Richmond; then

4.43pm and 5.43pm at Gordonsville. At 7.35pm a lot of people in Blackstone, about eighty miles south of Gordonsville, had observed a ‘round, shiny object with a golden glow’ moving from north to south. By 7.59pm the same object was observed by the people in the CIA radio facility at Blackstone. At 8.00pm a jet from Langley Air Force Base tried to intercept it, but five minutes later the object, moving too slowly to be an airplane, disappeared.

So inexplicable and disturbing were these reports that Captain Ruppelt was called to Washington DC to give a briefing in the restricted area of the fourth-floor ‘B’ ring of the Pentagon to General Samford, the Director of Intelligence, some of the members of his staff, two captains from the Office of Naval Intelligence, and some others whom Ruppelt had refused to name for security reasons. That meeting had resulted in a directive to take further steps to obtain positive identification of the UFOs.

Meanwhile, the sightings continued. By the end of June, it had become apparent that there was a considerable build-up of sightings in the eastern United States. In Massachusetts, New Jersey and Maryland jet fighters were scrambled almost nightly for a week, but always foiled when their radar-locks were broken by the abrupt, swift manoeuvres of the UFOs. On July 1, many UFOs were sighted over Boston, then began working their way down the coast. The same day two UFOs had come down across Boston on a southwesterly heading, crossed Long Island, hovered a few minutes over the Army’s secret laboratories at Fort Monmouth, then proceeded towards Washington DC. A few hours later, the first report from Washington DC was submitted by a physics professor at George Washington University.

For the next couple of weeks, reports about Washington DC sightings poured in at the rate of twenty or thirty a day and, according to Ruppelt, unknowns were running about 40 percent. Finally, according to the *Washington Post*, last night, July 19, the greatest flap of them all had begun, with UFOs being tracked all over the capital and the restricted corridor around the White House filled with interceptor jets trying to chase UFOs.

Immensely frustrated and angry, Dwight finished reading the report, then passed the paper to Bob. By the time Bob finished reading it, he, too, was furious that the ATIC had not been informed about the event.

‘Damned lucky we were coming here anyway,’ he said. ‘Otherwise they’d have kept us locked out. Why the hell would they do that?’

‘Maybe it was just an oversight,’ Dwight replied without conviction, staring

up at the sunny sky in the vain hope of seeing his first UFO. ‘The heat of the moment, and so on. They’re probably all frantic by now and just forgot to put the call through.’

‘Yeah,’ Bob said doubtfully, also glancing automatically at the empty sky over Virginia. ‘Maybe you’re right.’

When they were inside the Pentagon, that immense five-sided building in Arlington County, Dwight demanded an urgent meeting with Major Dewey Fournet, their UFO liaison man in the capital. Entering his office, located on the fourth floor, they found him in the company of Colonel Donald Bower, the intelligence officer from Bolling AFB, located just east of National Airport, across the Potomac River. Neither Fournet nor Bower looked pleased with this visit.

‘Okay, okay,’ a harassed Fournet said, waving his hands as if to defend himself. ‘I know what you’re going to say.’

‘So, what happened?’ Dwight asked.

‘We’ve just been too damned busy,’ Fournet replied. ‘It was an oversight, gentlemen.’ Dwight glanced at Major Bower. ‘I don’t believe that. Seems to me, you just wanted to keep us out. Why is that, Major?’

‘You’d have received a full report in due course,’ Major Bower said, his gaze steady and hard.

‘Your report, not ours, Major,’ Dwight replied. ‘It’s not the same thing.’ He removed his gaze from Bower and fixed it on Fournet instead. ‘So what are the facts, sir? Is the report in the *Washington Post* correct?’

Fournet shrugged. ‘Yeah, essentially correct. At 11.40pm the ARTC radars at Washington National Airport, about three miles south of the centre of Washington DC, picked up eight unidentified targets near Andrews AFB, Maryland, twenty miles east of National Airport and in direct line with National and Bolling. The objects were flying at approximately 100 to 130 miles per hour, then suddenly accelerated to fantastically high speeds and left the area. They soon returned, en masse. During the night, tower operators and the aircrews of several airliners saw unidentified lights in the same locations indicated by the radar. Before the night was out, and while interceptor jets tried and failed to catch them, the unidentified targets had moved into every sector covered by the radarscopes, including the prohibited corridor over the White House and the Capitol building. The climax came in the early hours of the morning, when the operators in the control tower at Andrews AFB, in response to an ARTC traffic controller’s query about a

target directly over the Andrews Radio range station, located near their tower, reported that a large, fiery, orange-coloured sphere was hovering in the sky directly above them.'
'Weather?'
'An analysis of the sightings has completely ruled out temperature inversions. Also, the radar operators at Washington National Airport and Andrews AFB - plus at least two veteran airline pilots - have all sworn that their sightings were caused by the radar waves bouncing off hard, *solid* objects.'
'Oh, boy!' Bob said, glancing at Dwight. 'This sounds really good.'
'That's hardly the right word to use,' Bower said. 'It certainly didn't seem good to the top brass of the Pentagon. Nor did it seem good to President Truman, who personally witnessed a UFO skimming right around the White House. In fact, at ten this morning, the President's air aide, Brigadier General Landry, called me, at Truman's personal request, to find out what the hell was going on.'
'Oh?' Dwight said, amused. 'And what did you tell him?'
'I hedged my answers,' Bower replied, 'because, truthfully, I couldn't explain the sightings away.'
'On behalf of the Air Force,' Fournet said, 'public relations officer Al Chops has given the press an official "No comment" on the sightings, but the reporters are still massed down there on the first floor, all baying for more. In the meantime, we're investigating the affair. That's all we can tell you.'
'Fine, Major,' Dwight said, taking note of Bob's cynical sideways glance and deciding not to raise any awkward points. 'Have you any objections to me doing my own investigation for the ATIC?'
Fournet glanced uneasily at Major Bower, who did not seem too pleased. Nevertheless, he said, 'Of course not, Cap'n Randall. Why should we mind?'
'Here,' Fournet said, trying to look helpful as he handed Dwight a manila folder. 'Two of the first reports submitted. One is the unofficial report from the Andrews AFB tower operators; the other is from an F-94C pilot who tried to intercept unidentified lights. I should warn you that these are just off-the-cuff, preliminary reports. More detailed, more accurate versions will be drafted and signed at a later date. But you might find them helpful for the time being.'
'And as I said,' Major Bower added, 'you'll be receiving our official report

when it’s been completed.’
‘I look forward to it,’ Dwight said, then he and Bob saluted and left the office.
‘Bullshitter,’ Bob whispered as they walked along the spoke-like, windowless corridor in one of the five concentric rings of the building, heading for the small office used by the ATIC when visiting here. ‘That Bower’s the one who stopped us from being informed - maybe because the President is now involved. Whatever was flying around here last night, they sure as hell don’t want us to know about it.’
‘Well, we’re going to get to know about it,’ Dwight said determinedly as he unlocked the door of the office at the far end of the corridor. ‘We’ll complete a thorough investigation and find out just what the hell those interceptor jets were pursuing in the restricted corridor around the White House. No intelligence officer from Bolling AFB is going to stop me - not Bower and not anyone else.’ He and Bob entered the office, switching on the light and closing the door behind them. It was a small, square-shaped room with no windows and nothing on the walls. Outside was US Highway 1 and, beyond it, the Potomac River, but they couldn't see either from this gloomy cell. Dwight placed his briefcase on the desk and gazed at the bare wall. ‘I want to speak to the chief radar operator at Andrews AFB and the F-94C pilot who put in this report,’ he said, fanning himself with the manila envelope. ‘Get on the blower, Bob.’
As Bob took the wooden chair beside the desk and picked up the phone, Dwight kicked off his shoes and massaged his hot feet through his socks. Bob flipped open the manila envelope, checked one of the two reports, then asked for the senior traffic controller in the Andrews AFB control tower. After a short wait, he nodded and Dwight picked up the other line.
‘Captain Chapman? This is Captain Dwight Randall of the Air Technical Intelligence Centre, Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, Ohio. I’m here at the Pentagon with Captain Bob Jackson to check out yesterday’s UFO flap. We thought you might be able to help us out.’
‘I put in a report to Major Bower,’ Captain Chapman responded, sounding uneasy. ‘Yes, Captain, I’ve got it right here. I believe you were in charge of operations when that huge, orange-coloured sphere was observed over the Andrews Radio range station, located near the control tower.’
‘Oh, yeah... *that*.’ Chapman sounded even more uncomfortable. ‘It wasn’t huge; it was large.’

‘Says right here it was *huge*.’
‘We were all pretty excited at the time. It was large, not huge.’
‘You saw it?’
‘Well, yeah, I saw it... but when we checked the data later, we realised it was only a star.’
‘*What*?’
‘It was only a star.’
Dwight glanced at Bob who, holding the phone to his ear, merely shrugged his shoulders.
‘I don’t get this, Captain,’ Dwight said. ‘I have your report right in front of me and it clearly describes the object as a - quote - huge, fiery-orange-coloured sphere.’
‘It was a large star. I know it was. When I submitted that report, we were all pretty scared and excited. I now regret that description.’
‘Okay: it was large. However, I find it hard to credit that seven trained radar operators would mistake a large, fiery, orange-coloured sphere for a star.’
‘The heat of the moment, Captain. We all make mistakes. I’m going to change that description when I redraft the report. What we saw was an exceptionally bright star. That’s all there is to it.’
Dwight took a deep breath, glanced at Bob, who shrugged again, then let his breath out in an audible sigh. ‘The report also states that you and the six other traffic controllers on the shift saw this object, or star, hovering over the Andrews Radio range station, at precisely the same moment the radar operators at National Airport reported having a target over the very same location.’
‘I can’t account for that, Captain, except to say that the radars all over Washington DC were going crazy last night and a lot of atmospheric anomalies are suspected. What we saw was a star.’
‘Okay, Captain, thanks.’ Dwight pressed the phone-cradle down, cutting Chapman off, then said, ‘Get on to that guy in charge of the astronomical charts and ask him if there were any unusually bright stars in the sky last night.’
Bob leafed through his notebook, dialled a number and asked for Air Force corporal Alan Collins. After explaining what he wanted, he sat waiting, drumming his fingers nervously on the desk and studying the ceiling. Eventually he nodded, went, ‘Mmmmm, thanks corporal,’ and dropped the phone back on its cradle. ‘Nope,’ he said. ‘No exceptionally bright stars

where that UFO was seen. None at all, Dwight.'
'Damn! Is the pilot of that F-94C available?'
Bob tugged the second report out of the manila folder, checked it, and said, 'Yeah, he's located at Bolling AFB - where our good friend, Major Bower, also comes from. You want me to try him?'
'Damned right, I do.'
Tracking down the pilot took a lot longer, but eventually Bob nodded again at Dwight and the latter picked up the phone. After introducing himself, he said, 'I'd like to hear in your own words exactly what you thought you were pursuing last night.'
'It was a ground light reflecting off a layer of haze.'
'*What*?'
'A ground light reflecting off – '
'I heard you, Lieutenant, I just don't believe you. I have your report right here and it says that the lights were high up in the sky, in the restricted air corridor around the White House, and that they descended, ascended, hovered, and shot off at incredible speeds.'
'An optical illusion, Captain.'
'But the report – '
'I wrote it in the heat of the moment, right after landing. I was pretty nervous and excited, Captain, not too sure of what was happening, but when I'd settled down and spoken to Major Bower, I realised that I'd misinterpreted what I'd seen.' Bob silently gave the thumbs-down.
'You spoke to Major Bower?' Dwight asked.
'That's right, Captain. Right after I landed. All of the pilots at Bolling were interrogated about what they had seen by the base intelligence officers.'
'And after interrogation, you were persuaded that what you had seen was not a lot of unidentified lights that made extraordinary manoeuvres over the White House, but simply a ground light reflecting off a layer of haze.'
'That's correct, Captain.'
'If you don't mind me saying so, Lieutenant, that seems a pretty ridiculous statement, given that this report – '
'I'm redrafting it, Captain, to make it more accurate.'
'Given that in this report,' Dwight insisted, 'you say that the lights repeatedly disappeared and reappeared in the sky before eventually shooting away.'
'An optical illusion caused by the layer of haze.'

‘No, Lieutenant, not possible. According to your statement, the disappearances and reappearances described by you were matched exactly by the radar readings - same location, same time.’
‘According to Major Bowers, the radar operatives later said they’d been mistaken. Given that, I can only confirm what I saw.’
‘A ground light reflecting off a layer of haze.’
‘Exactly.’
‘And that’s what’s going into your redrafted report?’
‘Yes, Captain.’
‘Thanks, Lieutenant.’ Angry and frustrated, Dwight dropped the phone, then glared at Bob, who was shrugging and spreading his hands in the air, signifying defeat. ‘Major Bower,’ Dwight said.
‘Intelligence chief of Bolling AFB. He also talked to the Andrews AFB radar flight controllers and radar operatives. Looks like a snow job.’
‘Which confirms that they didn’t call the ATIC because they didn’t want us snooping around. They’re putting the lid on this thing.’ Dwight hammered his fist on the table. ‘Well, damn them, I won’t let them. Let’s get a staff car and travel around a bit - Washington National Airport, Andrews AFB, airline offices, the weather bureau, and anywhere else we can think of. Damn it, let’s *do* it.’ Dwight picked up the phone and called the Pentagon transportation section.
‘Hi. Captain Dwight Randall of the ATIC speaking. I need a staff car for a couple of hours and – ’
‘Did you say the ATIC?’ the corporal at the other end of the line asked.
‘That’s right. The Air Technical Intelligence Centre. I need a staff car to – ’
‘Just a moment, sir.’ There was a pause on the other end of the line, followed by whispering, then the corporal came back on. ‘Sorry, sir. Did you say Captain Dwight Randall?’
‘Yes, corporal, and – ’
‘I’m sorry, sir, but I’m afraid I can’t help you. Regulations say that we can’t make staff cars available to anyone other than senior colonels or generals.’
‘Bullshit.’
‘Sorry, sir, but those are the regulations.’
‘Since when?’
‘Just recently, sir.’
‘Dammit, corporal, I want that staff car!’
‘Sorry, sir, I can’t help you. Not unless you get authorisation from a senior

colonel or general.'
'Alright, damn you, I will.' Dwight pressed the cradle down. 'Can you believe this shit?' he said to Bob. 'New regulation says we can't have a car unless we're senior colonels or generals.'
'New regulation invented just for us,' Bob said. 'Why not try General Samford? He'll be obliged to help you.'
'Why not?' Dwight said. When he tried to contact the general, however, he was told that Samford wasn't in his office. When he asked the secretary to track him down, he was told that Samford couldn't be found. 'To hell with this,' Dwight said, slamming the phone down and then putting his shoes on again. 'Let's go down to the finance office and charge a rented car to expenses. They can't argue with that.'
But they did. When Dwight and Bob put their request to the heavy, grey-haired lady in the Pentagon finance office, she looked embarrassed, checked their names again, then said nervously: 'Sorry, sir, but I can't do that. Policy is that if you don't have a staff car, you use city buses.'
'Ma'm, this is a matter of extreme urgency and one requiring a lot of travelling. We don't know the bus system and it would take us hours to get to all the places we need to visit.'
'Sorry, sir, but I still can't help you. If it's that important, I suggest you use a cab and pay for it out of your per diem.'
'I can't afford to do that, Ma'm. This job is going to take a couple of days and requires travelling all over Virginia. At nine dollars a day per diem, I can hardly – '
'Besides,' the lady said, examining Dwight's papers, 'this travel order only covers a trip to the Pentagon - not Washington, and certainly not a trip around Virginia. In fact, according to this, you're supposed to be on your way back to Dayton by now.'
'Well, I'm not going. This work is more important, and I'm pretty sure - '
The lady sighed and handed back his travel orders. 'Unless you're willing to go through all the red tape of getting these orders amended, you won't be able to collect *any* per diem. Also, you'll be technically AWOL.'
'Are you kidding me?'
'No, sir, I'm not. If you don't head back to Dayton today, you'll both be classified AWOL. I can't help you, sir.'
Clenching his fist around his damned travel orders, Dwight stormed out of the finance office, followed by Bob. He was just about to head back to his

office, when Bob stopped him by tugging at his elbow.
‘What?’
‘We’ve gotta leave,’ Bob said. ‘We can’t afford to be AWOL. If they’re really trying to stop us, they’ll use the AWOL as an excuse to tan our hides. We’ve got to go back, Dwight.’
‘No, damn it, I won’t let them give me the runaround this way. I have friends at Andrews AFB, so let’s go there and ask them to call Wright-Patterson for permission to stay in this area for another week or so. That’ll enable us to continue our investigations without the help or hindrance of the bastards in here.’
Bob puffed his cheeks out and blew a gust of air. ‘I think one of us should go back,’ he said. ‘Hold the fort, so to speak. The teletype machines are bound to be going mad at the ATIC, so one of us should be back there to help Captain Ruppelt. If you want to stay here, okay, and I’ll go back and clear it with Ruppelt.’
‘Great,’ Dwight said. ‘You smooth matters out with Ruppelt and I’ll call Beth this evening and explain things.’
‘One call I wouldn’t want to make, partner. Rather you than me.’
‘I’ll be fine,’ Dwight said.
He and Bob returned to the ATIC office, picked up their briefcases, switched off the light, locked the door and then left the Pentagon. They took a taxi to the Washington National Terminal Airport Building. There Bob was dropped off and Dwight, still boiling mad, took a bus all the way to Andrews AFB, twenty miles east, in Maryland.

On the evening of July 26, Dwight was having coffee alone in the almost deserted officer’s mess of Andrews AFB, thinking gloomily that he had been here for exactly one week to the day, sharing a room with three other officers, phoning Bob Jackson or Captain Ruppelt every afternoon and Beth every evening, when he was inclined to feel most miserable, and had received nothing valuable regarding the UFOs in return for his suffering.

In fact, he was gloomily pondering the ironic fact that he was second-in-command of Project Blue Book and yet had never personally seen a UFO. Every evening since Bob’s departure, Dwight had been out prowling around the airstrip of Andrews AFB, scanning the night sky for UFOs, but so far he hadn’t seen a damned thing. Nor had the radar operators or pilots - a fact that only increased Dwight’s feelings of frustration and inadequacy.

Oddly enough, there had been a flurry of UFO sightings the previous day and evening, though none of them over Washington DC First, amber-red lights had been observed over the Guided Missile Long-Range Proving Ground at Patrick AFB, Florida. Next, a UFO described as ‘a large, round, silver object that spun on its vertical axis’ had been seen to cross 100 degrees of afternoon sky in forty-eight seconds. Then, in the late afternoon, interceptor jets had chased UFOs over Los Alamos and Holyoke, Massachussetts, losing them as they turned into the sun. Finally, that night, F-94s had tried in vain to intercept unidentified lights reported by the Ground Observer Corps in Massachussetts and New Jersey.

But nothing over Washington DC...

And not a thing over Andrews AFB, where Dwight, after a week on his own, was starting to feel that the whole business was some kind of bad dream that had almost broken up his marriage and might soon break him.

He was gloomily pondering this, at 10.30pm, when he heard his name being called out over the tannoy system, asking him to report urgently to the control tower. Dwight jumped up and ran.

The Andrews AFB control tower was in pandemonium, with most of the traffic controllers, eerily shadowed in the night lighting, grouped around the 24-inch radarscopes and staring at rapidly multiplying targets.

‘Same as last time,’ the captain in charge said, jabbing his fingers at the screens, ‘but this time they’re not just over Washington DC. Those UFOs are spread out in a huge arc from Herndon, Virginia, to here. They’re right above Washington National Airport - and also right above us. In other words, they have Washington boxed in.’

‘Jesus Christ!’ an Air force sergeant whispered.

With everyone else, Dwight glanced automatically at the sky above the darkened, lamplit airfield, but saw only the moon and stars. According to the radar, some of those UFOs were overhead, but they couldn’t be seen by the naked eye. To confirm that they actually existed, you had to look at the radarscopes... and there they were: all those white lights constantly on the move, forming a great arc around Virginia and Maryland, but closing in on Washington DC.

‘God damn it!’ someone else exclaimed softly, glancing up at the sky. ‘Where the hell are they?’

A group of F-94s were already racing along the airstrip and taking off into the sky, in pursuit of the targets on the radar screens. Even as they

disappeared in the direction of Washington DC, the telephone rang. The chief traffic controller answered it, nodded his head, then lowered the phone and said, ‘The targets have just left the radarscopes at Washington National Airport, but already people around Langley AFB, near Newport News, as well as the radar operators in Langley Tower, are reporting weird lights that appear to be rotating and giving off alternating colours.’

‘Jesus Christ!’ the sergeant whispered again.

Increasingly excited, but also frustrated because he could actually see nothing other than the targets on the radarscopes, Dwight remained in the control tower as the drama unfolded.

By 11.30pm four or five of the targets were being tracked continually over the Capitol. F-94 interceptor jets tried and failed to catch them. Shortly after the UFOs left the sky over the Capitol building, more reports came in from Langley Tower, where the operators again described them as unidentified lights that were rotating and giving off alternating colours. Another F-94 was dispatched from Langley AFB and visually vectored to the lights by the tower operators. The pilot reported that as he approached one of the lights, it went out ‘like somebody turning off a light bulb’. No sooner had this happened, than the targets came back on the radarscopes at Washington National Airport. Again, F-94s were dispatched to locate them... but each time they were vectored into the lights, the UFO disappeared abruptly from the radarscopes and the pilots simultaneously reported that they had visually observed the lights blinking out.

Eventually too frustrated to take it any longer, Dwight tried dialling the Pentagon. Unable to get through because the lines were tied up - or so the frantic switchboard operator informed him - he phoned an old reporter buddy, Rex Ginna, *Life’s* UFO expert, operating out of the magazine’s Washington News Bureau.

‘I can’t get through to the Pentagon,’ Dwight said. ‘What can you actually *see* there, Rex?’

‘Fantastic!’ Rex exclaimed. ‘A real light show here! They could be lights - or silvery discs – it’s hard to say what - but they’re racing to and fro across the sky right above us. They’re also above the Capitol and the White House.’

‘Oh, my God,’ Dwight groaned, ‘and I’m trapped here. What are they doing?’

‘They look like bright stars from here. Small lights... or high up. They’re like light bulbs, but sometimes they spin so fast, they become a silvery blur.

They’re flying in all directions. Sometimes they stop and hover. They rise and descend vertically, shoot sideways, perform all kinds of tricks. Sometimes they’re so low, they actually circle the Capitol and the White House, then they shoot up again at incredible speed and then just blink out like light bulbs. Damned amazing, I’m telling you.’

That phrase again, Dwight thought. *They blink out like light bulbs.*

‘Anyway,’ Ginna said, ‘they must be taking it pretty serious. All the reporters were ordered out of the radar rooms of Virginia as soon as the interceptor jets went after the UFOs. They told us it was because the procedures used in an intercept were classified, but we know that’s bullshit. Most ham operators can build the equipment needed to listen in on an intercept. No, the real reason they threw us out is that some top brass are convinced that this is the night some pilot’s gonna get a good, close look at a UFO - and they don’t want the press to spread the word. So here I am in the news bureau instead, watching the whole show. Too bad you can’t see it.’

‘Go to hell, Rex!’ Dwight hung up on Ginna's chuckling, then tried the Pentagon again. Getting through this time, he asked for Dewey Fournet and was surprised to get him. Fournet sounded harassed.

‘Yeah,’ he said. ‘Right. No point in denying it. Those things are visible overhead and solid, *metallic* objects are causing the blips on the radarscopes. They can’t possibly be caused by anything else; and whatever they are, they can literally hover in the air, then accelerate to fantastic speeds.’

’And they definitely can’t be caused by temperature inversions?’

‘No way. We’ve just checked out the strength of the inversions through the Air Defence Command Weather Forecast Centre - and there’s no temperature inversion strong enough to show up on the radar. Finally, no weather target makes a 180-degree turn and flies away every time an airplane reaches it. Like I say, those things are solid and *metallic*. They’re also controlled.’

‘Any indication of size?’

‘We don’t think they’re that big. In fact, we think they’re pretty small. Not big enough to be manned. Some of the ones our pilots are seeing seem much bigger, though we can’t be too sure yet. It’s the small ones that are coming down real low and winging around the Capitol and... Well, I might as well tell you... President Truman almost went apeshit when he saw them skimming right around the White House. This whole place is bananas.’

When Dwight put the phone down, he looked up at the sky and was again

frustrated to see only stars. Looking at the radarscope, he saw that the screen was literally filled with the white dots, clearly showing that the UFOs were still high in the sky over Andrews AFB.

‘Damn it,’ Dwight whispered, ‘where *are* they?’

Even as he spoke, the lights on the radarscope raced in towards one another, to form a single, bigger light that flared up and then went right off the screen.

‘What the hell...?’ the chief traffic controller said, as his men all bunched up closer around the radarscope, wondering where all the targets had gone so suddenly.

At that moment, the floor of the radar tower shook briefly.

Everyone looked outside, as if searching for an earthquake, but they saw nothing but the darkened, lamplit airstrip.

The floor shook a second time, settled down again, and then an eerie yellow light filled the control tower, beaming in from outside, and gradually changed to an amberorange light that appeared to be beaming down from above. As everyone looked up, straining to see out through the windows, the floor shook a third time, a bass humming sound filled the silence, and the amber-orange light, now clearly beaming down from above, turned into a huge, fiery, orange-coloured sphere that was descending slowly, inexorably, upon the control tower, as if about to land on it and crush it.

With everyone else in the control tower, Dwight looked up at that dazzling apparition, paralysed by amazement and disbelief, his heart pounding dangerously.

Then everything went dark.

Chapter Fifteen

The so-called UFO ‘invasion’ of Washington DC led to a secret midnight meeting in the Oval Room of the White House between Wilson and President Truman, General Samford, Head of Air Intelligence, General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, USAF Chief of Staff, and CIA agent, Sam Fuller, through whom the first approach to Samford had been made. Wilson, wearing civilian clothes and already almost fully recovered after his recent operations, was accompanied by the icy Artur Nebe. Truman was seated behind the ornate oak desk, framed by the Presidential flag and the flag of the United States, with Samford and Vandenberg, both in full uniform, at one side of him and Fuller, wearing a light grey suit, shirt and tie, at the other.

All three men were standing just in front of the high French windows overlooking the West Wing's Rose Garden.

Taking a chair at the other side of the desk, with Nebe just behind him, Wilson studied Sam Fuller's cynical, sharp-eyed gaze and the wary faces of the two generals, then he offered President Truman an engaging smile.

'So, Mr President,' he said, 'how did you like our two UFO displays over Washington

DC?'

'Very impressive,' President Truman replied, not returning the smile.

'I'm glad you think so, Mr President.'

'I'm sure you are,' Truman said with soft sarcasm.

'I assume you know that not *all* of the saucers were mine.'

'Weren't they?'

'No. During the second invasion some of your own saucers, the ones constructed in

Malton, Ontario, attempted to intercept, but failed dismally and were pursued back to Canada.'

'We just thought we'd try it on,' Fuller said sardonically.

'Don't do it again,' Wilson told him, then turned his attention to generals Samford

and Vandenberg. 'Can I take it that you gentleman are now convinced of the superiority

of our technology?'

Both men just stared at him, too speechless with rage to speak.

'I take your silence as reluctant agreement. Can I therefore also assume that you will

now make no further attempts to thwart us, either in the skies or in Antarctica?' 'Damn it – ' Samford began.

'You can take it that for the time being, at least,' Vandenberg said, sounding choked,

'we accept that such moves would be pointless.'

Wilson nodded, acknowledging the oblique, temporary surrender, then he returned his

attention to President Truman. The President did not avoid his gaze, but took his time

before speaking.

'Just tell us what you want,' he said.

‘Antarctica is now the most valuable piece of real estate in the world.’ ‘I’m well aware of that fact, Mr Wilson, and also of the fact that you control it simply
by being there.’
‘Antarctica is also the greatest natural laboratory on Earth and the West now needs to
exploit it.’
‘Correct,’ the President said.
‘You also desperately need its water and mineral wealth, which is why you need me.’ ‘I am all ears,’ the President said when Wilson paused to let the import of his words
sink in.
‘If you wish to populate Antarctica with your scientists and research facilities without
being harassed by my saucers,’ Wilson calmly informed him, ‘you’ll have to agree to the
trade previously discussed that night in Virginia. In return, I’ll let those already in
Antarctica remain unmolested to engage in reasonable scientific research.’
‘What’s your idea of reasonable?’
‘I’ll obviously monitor their activities and put a stop to anything that presents a threat
to my colony.’
‘You have no right – ’ Samford began, but was waved into silence by the President.
‘In return for the supplies I need,’ Wilson continued, intrigued to see how quickly even
men of great power and authority could be reduced to petty human behaviourial
patterns, ‘I will pass on valuable secrets of my technology, on a pro rata basis, though
only after my own technology has superseded what I choose to give you at any given
moment in time. In this way, my technology will turn the US into the most advanced
nation on earth, scientifically and militarily, while simultaneously ensuring that it will

never become advanced enough to threaten our own existence in Antarctica.’
The President stared steadily at Wilson for a moment, then swivelled around in his
chair to judge the reaction of his two generals. Samford looked enraged and helpless at
once; whereas Vandenberg, though normally a man of immense authority, was revealing
the first signs of shock and disbelief.
‘What if we say no?’ Fuller asked, his gaze direct and unafraid, his lips curved in a
slight, sardonic grin.
This man is like Nebe, Wilson thought. He thrives on intrigue. Though the one in this
room with the least authority, he’s the one I must watch the most.
‘Then I’ll trade with the Soviets,’ Wilson said, ‘and maybe even the Chinese. The
choice is entirely yours.’
Vandenberg opened and closed his fists, Samford turned a deep red, and the President swivelled back in his chair to face Wilson again.
‘You’re an American,’ he said quietly.
‘A goddamned traitor!’ Samford exploded.
‘Right!’ Vandenberg added, almost choking with anger.
‘Gentlemen, gentlemen!’ the President admonished them, waving them into silence. Observing the two outraged, high-ranking military officers, Wilson recalled how, all
those years ago, the great, innovatory work of himself and Robert H. Goddard had been
ignored consistently by the US government and military establishment. He also
remembered how their negative reactions to his genius had forced him to destroy his great work, drop out of sight, and spend three decades of his life in lonely anonymity, until he saw his opportunity in Nazi Germany, where his work and that of Goddard was greatly respected, even if for the wrong reasons. Now this United States president and his generals and intelligence officers - the same breed of man who had previously tried to stop his work and failed to support Goddard - were accusing him of being a traitor to
his country, even as they hypocritically bartered to obtain his technology.

‘I’m a scientist,’ he told them. ‘Nothing more and nothing less. I’m not moved by your patriotism, which is merely self-interest, and I won’t be a traitor to myself just because you accuse me of being a traitor to my country. You have more blood on your hands than I do - and for less admirable reasons. Now do you agree or not?’

‘No!’ Samford exploded.

‘We’ve no choice,’ Vandenberg argued. ‘We can’t let the Russians or Chinese get their hands on this traitor’s technology. I’m afraid we have to deal with him.’

There was silence for a moment while the President considered his options. Having previously met Samford and Fuller, Wilson took this opportunity to study General Hoyt S. Vandenberg. The general had been head of the Central Intelligence Group (later the CIA) from June 1946 to May 1947 and his uncle had been chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, then the most powerful committee in the Senate. Clearly, Vandenberg still had great influence in those areas, as well as all the authority inherent in his position as USAF Chief of Staff. This man, once he had accepted defeat, would be particularly useful.

President Truman was studying Wilson at length, disbelieving, quietly outraged, helplessly intrigued, but eventually he too was forced to raise his hands in surrender. ‘I agree with General Vandenberg,’ he said. ‘We have no choice in the matter. We must deal with this man.’

The ensuing silence was filled with dread and despair, until Nebe, finally speaking for the first time, said in his deadly soft, oddly threatening manner: ‘This leads to the

delicate matter of security.'
'Ah, yes!' Wilson exclaimed softly. 'I'd almost forgotten.' Studying Fuller, he saw
Nebe's murderous double behind his urbane manner and knew that what Nebe was about
to say would be understood by him. 'Go ahead, Nebe.'
'Since it's impossible to fly the saucers without being observed,' Nebe said, his voice
as chilling as his demeanour, 'whether they be our own highly advanced craft or your
crude US-Canadian prototypes, I suggest you implement the widespread use of ridicule,
harassment and confusion of UFO witnesses, official and otherwise.'
'We've already done that,' Fuller told him.
'Correct,' Vandenberg added. 'When Project Sign was established in January 1948 it
was given a 2A classification and placed under the jurisdiction of the Intelligence
Division of the Air Force's Air Material Command at Wright Field - later renamed the
Air Technical Intelligence Centre, or the ATIC. When Captain Dwight Randall of Sign
submitted his official, top-secret Estimate of the Situation in July of that year, I
personally rejected it on the grounds that it lacked proof, even though the proof was clearly conclusive. I then encouraged a whole new policy at Project Sign: in the future, Sign personnel were to assume that *all* UFO reports were hoaxes. They also had to check with FBI officers and with the criminal and subversive files of police departments, looking into the private lives of the witnesses to check if they were reliable. Most of the Project Sign team took this as fair warning that it wasn't wise to raise the subject of UFO sightings. To encourage this fear, I first leaked the news that Captain Randall's Estimate of the Situation had been incinerated, then renamed Sign as Project Grudge. As
anticipated, this was taken by all concerned as another indication of my displeasure.' 'Clever,' Nebe whispered admiringly.
'The function of Project Grudge,' Fuller explained, picking up where

Vandenberg had
left off, ‘was to shift the investigations away from the actual UFOs and on to those who
reported them. However, since a good twenty-three percent of their reports were still
classified as unknowns, this wasn’t easy. For this reason, Project Grudge launched a
CIA-backed public relations campaign designed to convince the American public that
UFOs did *not* represent anything unusual or extraordinary. As part of this debunking
effort, we encouraged the *Saturday Evening Post* journalist, Sidney Shallet, to write a
two-part article exposing UFOs as a waste of time; but when that backfired - by
increasing public interest rather than diminishing it - we got the Air Force to counteract
by stating officially that UFOs were either misidentifications of natural phenomena or
the products of mass hallucination. Project Grudge issued its final report in August 1949
- only six months after its inception. Put simply, its conclusion was that while twentythree percent of the UFO reports were still classified as unknowns, most had
psychological explanations and the investigation was therefore a waste of time and
should be downgraded even further. On December 27, the Air Force announced the
termination of the project. Shortly after, the Project Grudge records were stored and
most of its personnel were widely scattered.’
‘You can do more,’ Nebe said, ‘to encourage widespread confusion and fear of
ridicule when it comes to the reporting of UFOs. Your Air Force must be seen to be
supporting UFO investigations with Project Blue Book, while actually hampering them

behind the scenes and by otherwise making things unpleasant, or even dangerous, for
UFO witnesses and investigators. This can be done through the introduction of some
new, restrictive Air Force regulations. You should also form a supposedly secret panel
of leading scientists to investigate UFOs. However, this panel will also include CIA
representatives who will ensure that its official report ridicules the whole phenomenon
and then is leaked to the press.'
'You're asking us to turn our own, patriotic pilots and citizens into traitors,' Samford
said angrily, 'and, even worse, to do so while we're fighting the war in Korea.' 'A small sacrifice,' Wilson said, 'and one you must make. Otherwise there can be no
agreement between us.'
Samford was about to make another angry retort, but was cut short by the stern
glances of President Truman and General Vandenberg.
'As Head of Air Intelligence – ' Nebe nodded at General Samford – 'and USAF Chief of Staff' - he nodded at General Vandenberg – 'you two are in an excellent position to
do this, so please ensure that it's done.'
Vandenberg managed to keep his peace, if with visible effort, but Samford practically
turned purple and even took a step forward. 'I'd remind you that the last time we talked
you were relatively safe because we were in open countryside with your saucer hovering
right above us. This time, however, we're in the Oval Room of the White House, so
what the hell can you do to prevent us from arresting you right now?'
Smiling, Wilson told Samford to turn off the lights. When this had been done, the
Oval Room was plunged into moonlit darkness. Wilson then removed a pocket-sized

electronic device from his jacket pocket and whispered coded instructions into it. A few seconds later, a bass humming sound came from outside, seeming to fill the room, then the room shook a little, as if from an earth tremor, and a dazzling, pulsating, silverywhite light beamed in through the windows overlooking the Rose Garden. When they all stared at the windows, they saw what appeared to be a row of portholes in a metal body, with the light beaming out of them to form the single, blinding brilliance that now filled the Oval Room.

The row of lights bobbed up and down, as if hovering just above the ground, while the bass humming sound filled the room to exert a subtle, almost palpable, disturbing pressure. Then the humming noise ceased and the silvery-white lights blinked out, plunging the Oval Room back into moonlit darkness.

General Samford switched the room lights back on as Wilson stood up, preparing to leave with Nebe.

‘I’ll be spending a few days in the capital,’ he informed them with confidence, ‘so please don’t try any tricks while I’m here.’

‘We won’t,’ Fuller said.

General Samford glared at Wilson, General Vandenberg looked stunned, and President Truman simply stared at the windows as if in a state of shock.

Without another word, Fuller led Wilson and Nebe out of the Oval Room, then down to the White House garage, to drive them back to where they were staying, in the Hay Adams hotel.

Chapter Sixteen

Cold December winds were blowing dust across the desert when Fuller drove to the house of Mike and Gladys Bradley, near Eden Valley, Roswell, New Mexico. The sun was starting to sink when he got out of his car and walked up the steps of the modest ranch-style house in the middle of

nowhere, with only the El Capitán Mountain visible in the distance, beyond the otherwise featureless flatlands.

They sure like their privacy, Fuller thought as he rang the doorbell. Neither Bradley nor his wife was expecting the visit from Fuller and the latter gazed at him suspiciously through the mesh-wire of the outer door when she opened the main door.

‘Gladys Bradley?’ Fuller asked.

‘If you’re here, you must know that already, so why bother asking?’

Fuller had heard she was a tough old bird, so he wasn’t too surprised by her tart response. Though now nearing her sixties, Gladys was still as thin as a whip and had a gaunt, suntanned face, under grey hair cropped as short as a man’s. She was squinting at him through the smoke from the cigarette dangling from compressed lips.

‘I want to speak to your husband, Mrs Bradley.’

‘He may not want to speak to you, mister. Just who the hell are you?’

‘Sam Fuller. CIA.’

‘Oh, one of those.’ She clearly disapproved. ‘You got an appointment?’

Fuller shook his head. ‘No,’ Gladys said, ‘I didn’t think so. Goodnight, Mr Fuller.’

She was just about to close the main door again when Fuller jerked the outer door open and used his foot as a doorstop on the other one. ‘Don’t close the door, Mrs Bradley. I might hurt my foot. If I do, I’m liable to get angry and that leads to trouble. You look like a woman of some perception, so you know I’m not lying. Now do I come in or not?’

Still a reporter to her fingertips, Gladys studied him for a moment, then nodded and opened the inner door. ‘Okay,’ she said. ‘I know trouble when I see it. You promise me none of that and I’ll let you in.’

‘No trouble,’ Fuller said.

Gladys nodded again, then stepped aside to let him pass. He entered a short hallway with doors on either side. Gladys closed the door behind him, then skipped ahead to lead him into the expansive living room, which had an open-beam ceiling, walls and floors of pine boards, and comfortable, old-fashioned furniture on Mexican carpets. As they entered, Mike Bradley looked up in surprise, then rose from his armchair in front of the flickering TV set.

‘Sam Fuller,’ Gladys said, waving a careless hand in Fuller’s direction. ‘CIA. He was very persistent. Wants to ask a few questions.’

Bradley nodded, understanding what she meant, then looked directly at Fuller. He didn't extend his hand.
'CIA?'
'That's right, Mr Bradley. I know you won't want to answer my questions, but I'm afraid you'll just have to.'
Just as Gladys had done, Mike Bradley studied Fuller carefully, then glanced inquiringly at his wife.
'It's been years now,' Gladys said. 'It can't make too much difference. This one's trouble and we don't need that at our age. Just answer his questions, Mike.'
Bradley nodded, then held out his hand. 'Hi,' he said as Fuller shook it. 'Can I get you a drink?'
'I could sure do with a beer,' Fuller replied.
'I'll get it,' Gladys said.
As she disappeared into the kitchen, Bradley indicated that Fuller should take an armchair facing the TV. When Fuller did so, Bradley switched the set off - Milton Berle was hamming it up in the Texaco Star Theater - and took the comfortable armchair facing him. At fifty-eight years old, Bradley was still a handsome, well-built, silveryhaired man, though the skin on one cheek was slightly livid from what looked like an old burn.
The explosion at Kiel Harbour, Fuller thought. That's what put him in hospital. Otherwise, the guy looks like Spencer Tracy. A dead ringer, in fact.
'Nice house,' Fuller said, glancing around the living room.
'Yes,' Bradley said, 'we think so.'
The pine-board walls were covered with framed photos taken from the personal history of the two people who lived here. Apart from early family portraits, the photos of Gladys showed her as a reporter in Roswell in the 1930s, including some with Robert H. Goddard and his rocket team; then the Spanish Civil War, including some of Ernest Hemingway; plus London, England, during World War II; liberated Paris, France; then more journalistic encounters in Roswell after the war. Other photos showed Gladys and Bradley, both in uniform, also in London and liberated Paris during the war, or Bradley with other military personnel in France and Germany during the same period. Fuller assumed that the framed photos of a young man and strikingly similar young woman, sometimes alone, other times with children or Bradley, were of Bradley's son and daughter and grandchildren. There were no photos of Bradley's former wife, who had died at Pearl Harbour.

‘You two have obviously lived a full life,’ Fuller said.
‘If you’re in the CIA, Mr Fuller, I’m sure you know as much about us as we do.’
Fuller grinned. ‘Yeah, I guess so.’
Gladys returned with his beer, handed it to him, then took the chair between him and Bradley. Fuller sipped the beer, which was ice cold, then he licked his wet lips.
‘Well,’ he said, ‘times have sure changed since you two got together during World War Two. That was some damned explosion last week, right?’
‘It sure was,’ Bradley replied, his gaze steady and watchful. ‘And so was the one the month before.’
He was referring to Britain’s first atomic bomb test in Monte Bello Islands, off the northwest coast of Australia, which had taken place about eight weeks ago. Fuller, on the other hand, was referring to the obliteration of the whole island of Eniwetok, in the Pacific, by the US hydrogen bomb test of two days ago.
‘An awesome sight,’ Fuller said.
‘Some would call it terrifying.’
‘Yeah... And now we’re being plagued by these damned flying saucers. The world’s certainly changing.’
‘We both know why you’re here, Mr Fuller. You don’t have to introduce the subject in this roundabout manner. You want to know why I didn’t turn up at the Socorro UFO crash site on July 2, 1947, five years ago. You want to know what I know.’
Fuller sighed. ‘Yeah, that’s it.’ Glancing at Gladys, he met a measuring, grey-eyed gaze, so quickly turned back to Bradley. ‘Okay, you know why I’m here. From the day you returned from the war in Europe, you were obsessed with UFOs, or flying saucers, and kept in constant touch with the Flight Intelligence Officer of Roswell Army Air Base, First Lieutenant William B. Harris, hounding him for information on any sightings. Yet that night in July, 1947, when Harris called to inform you that a flying saucer had actually crashed on the Plain of Magdalena, near Socorro, inviting you to go and view the crash debris with him, you didn’t show up and ever since have refused to say why. You also stopped investigating, or even discussing, UFOs from that night on. What happened, Mr Bradley?’
‘What do you know about my activities during the war?’
‘You were trying to track down a brilliant American physicist who had once

worked with Robert H. Goddard, right here in Roswell, before absconding to Germany and ending up in charge of a top-secret Nazi research project. He was called John Wilson. Born Montezuma, Iowa, in – ’
‘You know what that research project was, don’t you?’
‘We believe it was called Projekt Saucer. We also have grounds for believing that it involved the construction of a highly advanced, jet-propelled, saucer-shaped aircraft.’
‘Correct. Then you also know that my reason for being at Kiel Harbour just before the close of the war was to try and capture Wilson before he made his escape.’
‘By submarine?’
‘You must know that as well.’
‘No,’ Fuller lied, wanting Bradley to reveal as much as possible from his own knowledge. ‘The report on your World War Two activities has been heavily censored. I only know that you made it as far as Kiel, where you were badly wounded in an explosion on the dock. I wasn’t sure if you knew what had happened to Wilson.’
‘Yes, I knew. Wilson and some of his cronies were taken on board the Nazi submarine U-977, which I actually saw leaving Kiel harbour. Just before the submarine put out to sea, one of Wilson’s Nazi pals, an SS lieutenant, found me lying hurt on the dock, after my car had been overturned. He introduced himself, saying his name was Stoll, and confirmed that Wilson was on board the submarine. He also said that Wilson would remember my name. Then he blew up the nearby warehouses, which contained trucks stacked high with slaughtered SS troops: the only remaining witnesses, apart from myself, to Wilson’s escape. As you know, I was badly wounded by that same explosion and spent many months in hospital, first in Germany, then back here. When I was released, I became obsessed with flying saucers - not mere UFOs - because I knew damned well that they existed and I wanted to prove it.’
‘So why didn’t you go with First Lieutenant William Harris when he invited you to the site of the Socorro crash?’
‘Initially, I intended going,’ Bradley confessed. ‘In fact, I left here immediately and was heading for Roswell Air Base, to meet Lieutenant Harris, when I realised that I was being tracked by a flying saucer. It landed on the road ahead and made the engine of my car malfunction; then three men dressed in black dropped out of the base of the flying saucer and surrounded my car. One of them introduced himself as Wilson.’

‘Christ,’ Fuller exclaimed softly. Glancing at Gladys, he saw that she was still gazing steadily at him, not trusting him an inch. ‘So what did Wilson say?’ Fuller asked, turning back to Bradley.

‘He told me that the world we know is dying - a world of wasteful emotions - and that the new world, his world, was approaching and couldn’t be held back. His world, he informed me, would be one of truth, or pitiless logic, and his technology was going to take us there. He then told me to stop pursuing him. He threatened Gladys and my grandchildren. He explained that his flying saucers would fly the skies with impunity and that those who reported them - presumably including me - would be ridiculed and, where necessary, silenced. He told me again to think of my children. To enjoy my retirement. Then he bid me *Auf Wiedersehen* and took off in his saucer. I was frightened by the advanced capability of that flying saucer, by what Wilson had said, by the knowledge that he had managed to track me down, and so I stopped chasing UFOs.’

Gladys Bradley reached over to squeeze her husband’s hand. When he smiled, she let his hand go and sat back again.

Fuller had another sip of beer, then put the glass down. ‘The saucer made the engine of your car cut out?’

‘That’s right. A kind of bass humming sound, almost physical, head-tightening. Then the engine of my car cut out and wouldn’t start again.’

‘Why didn’t you get out and run for it?’

‘I tried, but felt paralysed. It wasn’t fear, though I certainly felt that. It was some kind of paralysis.’

‘A kind of hypnotism?’

‘I was fully conscious, but it could have been something like that.’

‘How did you get back to your home when the saucer took off?’

‘I just turned the ignition key and the damned thing started up as if nothing had happened, letting me drive home. But no way, after what I’d seen, felt and heard, was I going to go up against that Wilson.’

‘Since then, have you ever felt you were being watched? Any contact with UFOs?’

‘Yes, on both counts. At least three or four times a year, always when driving at night, my car is paced by lights in the sky - either circular or in a long line, indicating a saucer shape. Also, though less frequently, Gladys and I will be awakened in the dead of night by lights beaming into the house from outside, often accompanied by that familiar bass humming sound. They’re keeping

their eye on us, Mr Fuller, and they always will.'
'Do you think they know we're having this conversation?'
'I really don't think so. I suspect they keep paying me the unexpected visits just to remind me that they haven't forgotten me. I'm taking a chance by having you here, but if they came tonight, it would just be a coincidence - an *unfortunate* coincidence.'
'I'm sorry to put you in this danger.'
'No, you're not,' Gladys said accusingly.
Fuller glanced at her, realised how tough she was, so just grinned and then wiped it from his face when he turned back to Bradley.
'So Wilson knew who you were,' he said, 'and also knew that you were there at Kiel harbour.'
'Absolutely,' Bradley said.
'Do you know where that submarine was taking him?'
'I didn't at the time, but I put it all together later, when I learned through the OSS organization that the submarine I'd seen in Kiel harbour, U-977, under the command of Captain Heinz Schaeffer, had docked at Mar del Plata, Argentina, a few months after the war.'
'You think they're in Argentina?'
'No. Neither Wilson nor that SS lieutenant Stoll were found on board. Nor were any of the mechanical parts or drawings relating to Projekt Saucer - so my guess is that they used Argentina as a springboard to the next stop.'
'Antarctica?'
'Yes. The Nazis were obsessed with building underground structures there - just like the enormous underground rocket complexes I saw at the end of the war in Belgium and Nordhausen, Thuringia. Documents found by Operation Paperclip indicated that virtually from the moment the Nazis illegally claimed Queen Maud Land in 1938, renaming it Neu Schwabenland, to the closing days of the war, they were shipping scientists, engineers, architects, builders, slave labour, and the material and plans for various highly advanced projects, including Projekt Saucer, to somewhere in Neu Schwabenland. So it didn't take much to put two-and-two together and come up with Antarctica. Then, when I read about Rear-Admiral Byrd's aborted Operation Highjump, in 1947, I was pretty much convinced that I was right. Wilson is somewhere in Queen Maud Land, either under or inside a mountain range, building flying saucers and god knows what else. It's a nightmare scenario.'

‘Do you think he’d be able to produce flying saucers with the capability of those being reported?’
‘Yes. My bet is that a lot of the saucers are small, remote-called machines that first evolved out of the German *Feuerballs*, better known during the war as Foo fighters. I certainly think they might be the ones involved in the so-called UFO invasion of Washington DC last July. Other saucers are bigger and piloted - just like the one that stopped me that night on the road to Roswell.’
‘What do you think happened to the Projekt Saucer documents and parts divided between the Russians and the Allies at the end of the war?’
‘I think it’s likely that they now have their own saucers, though they certainly won’t be as advanced as those created by Wilson and doubtless still being evolved in Antarctica.’
‘One last question,’ Fuller said, finishing his beer and preparing to leave. ‘If we sent an invitation, would you be prepared to return to UFO investigations on behalf of the US government?’
‘No, thanks, Mr Fuller.’
‘Thank *you*, Mr Bradley.’ Fuller stood up and turned to face Gladys, who hadn’t moved from her chair. ‘And thank you, Mrs Bradley.’
She just nodded, not trusting him an inch, letting Bradley walk him to the front door. They shook hands on the porch.
‘From what I’ve read, you’re a hell of a guy,’ Fuller said. ‘I mean, you really did some things in your time.’
Bradley smiled in a modest manner, then released Fuller’s hand. ‘Not really,’ he said. ‘But I hope that what I’ve told you helps. I just don’t want to be personally involved.’
‘You won’t be,’ Fuller promised.
Walking back to his car, he climbed in and then looked out the window. Bradley was still on the porch, the wind blowing his silvery hair, handsome and clearly a decent citizen in his white shirt and trousers. He raised his hand in farewell. Fuller waved back, turned on the ignition, and then drove away from the house. When he glanced back, Bradley had disappeared from the porch. The lights of the house beamed out into the darkness, under a vast, star-filled sky. A real picture-postcard scene.
Fuller only drove a short way along the road. He stopped when he came to another car that was parked by the side of the road with its headlights off. The man in the other car rolled his window down.

‘Well?’ he asked.
‘He knows all about Wilson,’ Fuller said. ‘Every damned thing.’
The other man nodded and then got out of his car, slinging a canvas bag over his shoulder. He walked back along the dark road, toward Bradley’s house. Fuller got out of his car, lit a cigarette and silently smoked it.
When Bradley’s house exploded and turned into a distant furnace that lit up the night, turning the sky a bloody red and erasing the stars, Fuller sighed, dropped the butt of his cigarette, ground it into the dust with the heel of his shoe, then climbed back into his own car and drove off.
‘Too bad,’ he murmured.

Chapter Seventeen

Dwight sometimes thought he would never work out just what it was he had seen that night in July 1952, hovering over the control tower of Andrews AFB as if about to descend upon it and crush it. In fact, the object, if such it had been, had merely hovered for a few seconds, dazzling them all with the radiance of what appeared to be its vast, swirling base, before it ascended again, making only a bass humming sound, almost an infrasound, then ascending abruptly and blinking out high above, plunging everyone in the control tower into a brief, blinding darkness.

Normal vision had returned soon enough, bringing the real world back with it, but from that day to this, Dwight had thought constantly about, and often dreamed about, that vision of luminous power, and wondered just what it was. Now, back in Washington DC, a year later but in the same month, he had to struggle to keep the memory of that night out of his thoughts and concentrate on what he was doing.

He was in the downtown office of the recently formed Aerial Phenomena Investigations Institute, or APII, a civilian UFO organisation, to give a clandestine ‘deep background’ interview to Dr Frederick Epstein, a 41-year astronomer and head of the institute, who had often been of great assistance to Project Blue Book in its evaluation of UFO reports.

Epstein was short and bulky, with a good thatch of hair, though there were streaks of telling grey in his dark Vandyke beard, which he tended to stroke a lot when deep in thought. He and Dwight were facing each other across a cluttered desk, in an office with walls covered by large charts showing the most commonly reported UFO shapes, the most commonly reported UFO formations and UFO manoeuvres, both singly and in formation, the worldwide locations and flight directions of the major UFO

waves from 1896 to the present, major UFO events in the United States and overseas, and details of the world's major UFO organisations. The most common flight direction for the UFOs, Dwight noted, was south to north and back again.

'It was the official reaction to the Washington sightings, more than anything else,' Dwight told Epstein, who was recording the conversation, 'that made all of us at Blue Book even more suspicious of the Air Force's stance on UFOs. Too many people were telling us one thing and then changing their stories for their official reports. Also, it became increasingly obvious that the top brass in the Air Force were trying to blind us with some dodgy manoeuvres. After the Washington sightings I became convinced that pilots reporting UFOs were being intimidated into changing their reports or simply remaining silent. I also suspected - and still do - that a lot of information was being withheld from us and that the CIA was stepping into the picture for unexplained reasons.'

Epstein stopped him there, in order to change the tapes. Dwight glanced at the window, but the curtains were drawn, even in broad daylight, and the door behind, he knew, was locked to prevent anyone coming in accidentally. It seemed a melodramatic thing to do and made him feel a little foolish, but when he thought of the mysterious deaths of Mike and Gladys Bradley, whose house had gone up in flames after an unexplained explosion about seven months ago - a tragedy that many thought had been caused by an act of arson - his foolishness was replaced with the fearful conviction that people investigating UFOs were putting themselves at risk.

Dwight was worried not only about himself, but about Beth and their daughter, Nichola. You just never knew...

When Epstein had changed the tapes, he looked up and said, 'Okay... The CIA was stepping into the picture for unexplained reasons.'

'Right. The person who most worried us was Chief of Staff, General Hoyt S. Vandenberg. It was Vandenberg who'd buried the original Project Sign Estimate, caused its incineration, and had the project renamed Project Grudge. We're still not sure just how much Vandenberg was influencing the Air Force or the CIA, but certainly he'd been head of the Central Intelligence Group, now the CIA, from June 1946 to May 1947 and his uncle had been chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, the most powerful committee in the Senate. Clearly, Vandenberg still has great influence in those areas - and it's from those very areas that pressure's always coming to

suppress the results of our UFO investigations.'
'So you weren't surprised,' Epstein said, smiling encouragingly, 'when you learnt that the CIA and some high-ranking officers, including Generals Vandenberg and Samford, were convening a panel of scientists to analyze all the Blue Book data.'
'No. And I wasn't surprised, either, to discover that this panel was to be headed by Dr H.P. Robertson, director of the Weapons System Evaluation Group in the Office of the Secretary of Defence - and a CIA classified employee. The Robertson panel, by the way, was also convened against the objections of the Batelle Memorial Institute - the private research group used by the Air Force to carry out statistical studies of UFO characteristics and advise them on UFO investigations. Normally the Air Force bows to the Batelle Memorial Institute's every demand, but not in this instance.'
'Certainly sounds like they're determined to form that panel, come hell or high water.'
'They are,' Dwight said.
'What can you tell me about the panel?'
'This is strictly deep background. My name's not to be mentioned.'
'You have my word on it,' Epstein said.
Dwight took a deep breath, feeling nervous, but determined to let out what was troubling him, hopefully for future use by Epstein's invaluable organisation. Exhaling his breath in a sigh, he said, 'The Robertson panel was convened in great secrecy right here in Washington DC last January. While some insist that it opened on January twelve, it actually ran from January fourteen to eighteen. Apart from Robertson, the group's panel consisted of physicist and Nobel Prize-winner Luis W. Alvarez; geophysicist and radar specialist Lloyd V. Berkner and physicist Samuel Goudsmit, both of the Brookhaven National Laboratories; and astronomer and astrophysicist Thornton Page, Deputy Director of the John Hopkins Operations Research Office. Other participants included J. Allen Hynek, an astronomer consultant to the United States Air Force; Frederick C. Durant, an army ordnance test station director; William M. Garland, the Commanding General of the ATIC; our Pentagon liaison officer, Major Dewey Fournet; my Project Blue Book chief, Captain Ruppelt; two officers from the Navy Photo Interpretation Laboratory; and three high-ranking CIA representatives.'
Epstein gave a low whistle. 'That's some group,' he said. 'Almost impossible to argue with.'

‘That seems to be the point,’ Dwight said. ‘The seriousness with which the subject was supposed to be treated is best illustrated not only by the calibre of the men involved, but also by the fact that the group’s report was to be given to the National Security Council, NSC, and then, if the decision was that the UFOs are of extraterrestrial origin, to the President himself.’
‘Which may have been so much cotton wool,’ Epstein said.
‘I think it was.’
Epstein nodded his understanding. ‘So what information was the Robertson panel given?’
‘For the first two days of the session, Captain Ruppelt reviewed the Blue Book findings for the scientists. First, he pointed out that Blue Book received reports of only ten percent of the UFO sightings made in the United States, which meant that in five and a half years about 44,000 sightings had been made. He then broke the sightings down into the percentage that was composed of balloons, aircraft, astronomical bodies, and other misinterpretations, such as birds, blowing paper, noctilucent and lenticular clouds, temperature inversions, reflections, and so forth, and pointed out that this still left 429 as definite unknowns. Of those, it was clear that the most reported shape was elliptical, the most often reported colour was white or metallic, the same number of UFOs were reported as being seen in daylight as at night, and the direction of travel equally covered the sixteen cardinal points of the compass. Seventy percent of those unknowns had been seen visually from the air - in other words, by experienced pilots and navigators; twelve percent had been seen visually from the ground; ten percent had been picked up by airborne and ground radar; and eight percent were combination visual-radar sightings. Ruppelt also confirmed that many UFO reports came from top-secret military establishments, such as atomic energy and missile-testing installations, plus harbours and manufacturing areas.’
‘That should have impressed them,’ Epstein said. ‘They always sit up when their own top-secret establishments are involved.’
‘It *should* have impressed them,’ Dwight said, hardly able to contain his lingering bitterness. ‘Ruppelt and Major Dewey Fournet had completed an analysis of the motions of the reported unknowns as a means of determining if they were intelligently controlled. Regarding this, Major Fournet told the panel of how, by eliminating every possibility of balloons, airplanes, astronomical bodies, and so forth, from the hundreds of reports studied, and by then analysing the motions of the unidentifieds in the remaining unknown

category, his study group had been forced to conclude that the UFOs were intelligently controlled by persons with brains equal to, or maybe surpassing, ours. The next step in the study, Fournet explained, had been to find out where those beings came from; and since it seemed unlikely that their machines could have been built in secret, the answer had to be that they came from outer space.'

'Substantiating evidence?' Epstein asked, distractedly stroking his beard and studying the turning spools in the tape-recorder, as if they might reveal something Dwight hadn't told him.

'Yes,' Dwight said. 'The morning after Fournet's summary, the panel was shown four strips of movie film that had been assessed as falling into the definite-unknown category. The cinetheodolite movies taken by Air Force technicians at the White Sands Proving Ground on April 27, 1950, and approximately a month later; the so-called Montana movie taken on August 15 the same year by the manager of the Great Falls baseball team; and the Tremonton movie taken on July 2, 1952, by Navy Chief Photographer, Warrant Officer Delbert C. Newhouse.'

'Let's take them in turn,' Epstein said.

'Right.' Dwight removed a kerchief from his pocket and wiped the sweat from his face. The room, with its windows closed and doors locked, was unbearably hot. 'One of the White Sands movies showed a dark smudgy object that proved only that *something* had been in the air and, whatever it was, it had been *moving*. The second movie had been analysed by the Data Reduction Group at Wright-Patterson AFB, with results indicating that the object had been approximately higher than 40,000 feet, travelling over 2,000 miles per hour, and was over 300 feet in diameter.'

Epstein gave another low whistle and shook his head from side to side in a gesture either of disbelief or admiration.

'The Montana movie showed two large, bright lights flying across the blue sky in an echelon formation. The lights didn't show any detail, but they appeared to be large, circular objects. The Tremonton movie showed about a dozen shiny, disc-like objects fading in and out constantly, performing extraordinary aerial manoeuvres, darting in and out and circling one another in a cloudless blue sky.'

'Astronomical phenomena?'

'No. Any possibility that they might have been that was dispelled when the film clearly showed them heading in the same tight cluster toward the

western horizon and, more specifically, when one of them left the main group and shot off to the east.'
'Don't tell me the panel refused to accept *that* evidence!'
Dwight rolled his eyes in disgust, then nodded affirmatively. 'They haven't released their official report yet, but according to Captain Ruppelt they didn't seem impressed.' He wiped his forehead again, then studied the kerchief. It was soaked with his sweat. 'Yet the Montana movie had been subjected to thousands of hours of analysis in the Air Force laboratory at Wright Field and the results proved conclusively that the objects weren't birds, balloons, aircraft, meteors, clouds, or reflections - in short, they were unknowns. As for the Tremonton movie, it had been studied for two solid months by the Navy Laboratory in Anacostia, Maryland, and their conclusion was that the unidentifieds weren't birds or airplanes, were probably travelling at several thousands of miles an hour, and judging by their extraordinary manoeuvres, were intelligently controlled vehicles. In other words, the evidence was conclusive.'
'But the panel still wasn't impressed.'
'No, damn them. After going over the evidence for two days, the bastards concluded in their initial report that the evidence was *not* substantial, that the continued emphasis on the reporting of the phenomena was resulting in a – quote - *threat to the orderly functioning of the protective organs of the body politic* – unquote - and that the reports clogged military channels, could possibly precipitate mass hysteria, and might encourage defence personnel to misidentify or ignore actual enemy aircraft.'
'In other words: the real problem wasn't the UFOs - it was the UFO *reports.'*
'You've got it,' Dwight said.
Even talking about it could make him feel bad these days, bringing his buried fears to the surface and encouraging what he sometimes believed was his growing paranoia. Yesterday, watching TV, he had seen mud-smeared, weary American troops celebrating the end of the Korean war - a sight that had filled him with overwhelming nostalgia for his own fighting days in World War Two. It was a terrible truth that war had its attractions, but for Dwight it was something more than that: it was the desire to escape from the deepening darkness and dangers of his all-embracing UFO investigations. The news of the death of the former UFOlogist, Mike Bradley, and his wife Gladys, possibly by an act of murder, had certainly filled Beth with fear and again made her plead for Dwight to get out of this business. In fact, he had

tried, but the Air Force had refused his request; and now, when he thought of Bradley's blazing house, he felt trapped and threatened.

'So what do you think their official report will recommend?' Epstein asked him.

'Nothing honest or realistic,' Dwight replied. 'I think the whole idea behind the Robertson panel is to convince the American public that the Air Force has made the definitive study of UFOs and come up with a negative evaluation. In other words, their job is to shaft us... and I think they'll succeed.'

'That's why you're giving me this information?'

'Yes. I think Project Blue Book is going to be restrained by the recommendations of the Robertson panel. If that's true, you'll be able to use this info more effectively than us.'

'Thanks,' Epstein said, turning off the tapes. 'Sadly, I believe you're right.'

Dwight was glad to make his escape from the airless office in Dr Epstein's Aerial Phenomena Investigations Institute, or APII, and step back into the uplifting sunlight of late July in Washington DC. He caught a cab to the airport.

Chapter Eighteen

Marlon Clarke was talking to himself. His guillotined head had been separated from its original body for six years now, but was still functioning in an insane, chaotic manner. Still enclosed in a glass casing with an inner temperature reduced to just above the point of freezing, the head was connected to the two amputated hands and the surgically removed, still beating human heart in the chilled glass case on the desk beside it. Clarke's eyes were still open, but were wide with terror or madness. His dribbling lips were moving rapidly to form a torrent of words that could not actually be heard because of the cutting of his vocal chords. Attached by the severed neck to a steel-clamp base enclosing artificial blood vessels and the wiring that connected it to the amputated hands and beating heart, the head was moving slightly, the eyes roaming frantically left and right, as the fingers of the severed hands opened and closed spasmodically, sometimes making the hands crawl across the boxed-in table like large, insane spiders.

'The main problem,' Dr Gold was explaining to Wilson, Kammler and Nebe, 'is not in perfecting the psycho-physical interaction between head and body, but in retaining the sanity of the severed head. As you can see, Clarke's head is successfully receiving the blood being pumped by the

separate heart and has retained its power to agitate the amputated hands, though in a chaotic, useless manner. This suggests that while the head still has enough consciousness to send impulses to the severed limbs, it's in a state of delirium, or insanity, caused by disbelief and trauma. It's impossible to ascertain just what Clarke is thinking right now - if his thoughts still include self-awareness or not - but his wide-open, wandering eyes prove that at least he's still aware of *something*. We just can't tell how much.'

'So the main problem isn't physical, but psychological,' Wilson said. 'We have to find a way to minimise the shock and retain the severed head's sanity.'

'Exactly,' Dr Gold said. 'With regard to cyborg development, I believe we can solve this with artificially induced amnesia - chemical or electric stimulation of the relevant areas of the brain. In this case, the severed head, or the beneficiary of a surgically rearranged face, part original, part prosthetic, will assume that it's always been what it is and not suffer trauma. This way, please.'

Leading them across the laboratory, which had walls hacked out of the interior of the mountain and therefore gave no view of the Antarctic wilderness outside, Gold stopped at a bizarre, headless figure strapped upright to an electric chair that was wired to a large computer console. From the waist down, the figure was a perfectly normal, naked male, though the blood had been drained from the legs, giving them a pasty-white, slightly blue, mouldy appearance. However, from the waist up, the torso was artificial, made from moulded steel plates, with one plate missing, exposing a ghoulishly colourful mass of electric wiring and a narrow glimpse of the original intestines. One arm was missing from the headless torso and the other, Wilson noted, was actually a cobalt-chromium alloy prosthetic.

'The prototype for our first cyborg,' Gold explained. 'The lungs, kidneys and original intestines will remain, but will be strengthened and supported by a two-chamber pacemaker. Working prosthetic joint replacements have already been perfected and will help defeat the rigours of supersonic flight and space travel. The psycho-physical interaction between brain and artificial limbs will be stimulated by the use of an electronic metal skullplate and the problem of speech for the lower-face prosthetic, including new chin implant, will be solved by using an electronic larynx. Control of the cyborg will be attained by a combination of chemical-electronic stimulation of the brain and computerised, remote-control interfacing between the cyborg and

its activating machine, located here in the colony and in the saucers. These are early days yet, but I believe it can be accomplished relatively soon. If we can solve the problem of the sanity of the severed head, we're on our way to success.'

A severed human head was resting on a table beside the electric chair. One eye was missing. An odd-looking eye, rather like a glass marble, was resting on the table beside the one-eyed head.

Smiling, Gold picked up the loose eye and showed it to Wilson. 'An acrylic eye. We're trying various experiments with them. Unfortunately, so far, when we've implanted them in the heads of living subjects, they haven't worked well. When we replace only one eye, the living nerves of the remaining eye help the replacement to see slightly; but when we replace both eyes at the same time, blindness results. Still, given time and a regular supply of living subjects, we'll get there in good time.'

'There'll be no problem with living subjects,' Kammler said. 'Stoll is doing a good job in Paraguay and the supply of Ache Indians is limitless. You need have no fears there.'

'Good.' Gold glanced with pride around his busy laboratory, filled with whitesmocked surgeons, bio-engineers, dedicated scientists, headless torsoes, amputated limbs, and isolated, still pumping human hearts. 'Please, gentlemen, this way.'

He led them through the nearest door, along a short corridor, and into another, larger laboratory containing various chairs, some electric, others normal, all with buckled straps on the arms, and small, dark cells with leaded-steel doors containing narrow viewing panels.

There was a dreadful amount of noise in this laboratory - and the noise, by its very nature, was even more dreadful.

Gold introduced Wilson, Kammler and Nebe to Dr Eckhardt, formerly of an SS experimental medical unit. Eckhardt gave them a tour of his domain.

In a small side chamber, human subjects, male and female, were strapped to heavy chairs cemented into the floor, wearing headphones, bleeding profusely from their nostrils and ears. They were also, in some cases, vomiting into plastic bags taped to their mouths.

'Infrasounds,' Dr Eckhardt explained, raising his voice to defeat the agonised screaming of his victims. 'Sounds just below the level of human hearing - so condensed that they can create physical pressure on the human brain and the body's organs. At the moment, the particular infrasounds being

used are bursting the blood vessels in the heads of the human subjects, with the results that you see. We're also experimenting with other infrasound levels to ascertain their potential as surgical tools and beam weapons, which we hope to incorporate in our flying saucers. For this reason, we're also experimenting with strobe lights. Please, this way, gentlemen.'

In one of the darkened cells, behind the closed, sealed door, a man was being subjected to flickering strobe lights. Viewed through the narrow panels in the leadedsteel door, in the rapidly alternating light and darkness, he appeared to be writhing and kicking in slow motion, while tearing frantically at his hair or clawing his own naked, bloody body.

'The strobe lights,' Eckhardt explained, 'are flickering in the alpha-rhythm range, between eight and twelve cycles a second, thus causing an epileptic seizure in the human subject - as you can see. Other rhythms produce different results, inducing either drowsiness, full mesmerism, hunger, nausea, or various moods ranging from acute depression to uncontrollable violence. These, also, we are planning to incorporate into beam weapons for the saucers. Come, gentlemen, this way.'

A gaunt, pale-faced woman, wearing a one-piece black coverall, was strapped by her wrists and ankles to the arms and legs of an electric chair. A metal skullcap, wired to the console-control beside the chair, was being lowered onto her shaven head. The woman was sweating, trembling and weeping.

'Please don't,' she whispered.

'A stereotaxic skullcap,' Eckhardt explained, ignoring the woman's pleading as the metal device, containing hundreds of minute, hair-thin electrodes, was lowered onto her shaven head. 'When we can hypnotise or otherwise control human beings by remote control - say, with the use of brain-implants – we'll abduct those we want, implant them by means of a stereotaxic skullcap such as this, then return them to the world of ordinary men, to do our bidding as and when required. Eventually, in this way, we'll be able to enslave the world's most powerful men and women without resorting to war and with few aware that they're in our control. In other words, they'll become our brainimplanted robots.'

'You've perfected this?' Nebe asked.

'No,' Eckhardt confessed, 'not yet. At the moment, most of those subjected to electronic stimulation from the stereotaxic skullcaps become vegetables - but some are keeping their minds longer than others, so we're getting there

gradually. The breakthrough will come soon enough.'
He nodded in the direction of the white-smocked technician at the control console. When the technician flicked a switch, the woman screamed in agony, writhed violently in the chair - or as much as she could with her wrists and ankles strapped - then urinated and collapsed into stillness. The technician turned off the power while a medic examined the woman's pulse and heartbeat. Straightening up, he shook his head from side to side and said, 'Her heart's given out. I think we should try one of the adolescents; they have a much greater will to live.'
'Bring one in,' Eckhardt said.
'The cyborg-and-other experimentation is excellent,' Wilson told Gold when they had left Eckhardt to his work and were making their way back to Gold's laboratory, 'but what about human, non-prosthetic longevity? Are you making progress with that?'
'There are still considerable problems, particularly regarding the liver, but eventually even that will be solved. I would remind you that even in the West, some remarkable discoveries and advances have recently been made, including the discovery of DNA, the basic structure of life; the first full chemical analysis of a protein; and the first impregnation of a woman with deep frozen sperm - so the secrets of longevity, and even of life, are now within the bounds of possibility. I would therefore suggest that you arrange for the abduction of some scientists and biologists specialising in those fields.'
'I'll see to it,' Wilson said. 'In the meantime, you're doing invaluable work here. Keep it up, Dr Gold.'
Now back in Gold's laboratory, Wilson glanced once more at the mad eyes and dribbling, silently gibbering lips of the severed head of Marlon Clarke. Impressed, he led Kammler and Nebe out, walking along a recently completed tunnel, past brightly-lit side chambers containing other laboratories, workshops, machine-shops, and rooms containing spare parts and supplies, all guarded by armed men in black coveralls. At the end of the tunnel, in a brightly-lit open space carved out of the rock, they took a lift up to Wilson's office, located near the summit of the mountain.
Entering, Wilson was briefly dazzled by the vast, sunlit Antarctic as seen through the panoramic windows that stretched along the full length of one wall, just beyond his desk. He did not sit at the desk, but instead indicated the chairs grouped around a table placed right in front of the window, giving

a magnificent view of the white wilderness. The table had been prepared for dinner, with a bottle of white wine being chilled in a bucket. The food, which already was on the plates, consisted of a simple green salad, wholewheat bread and cheese. Wilson liked to eat healthily.

‘Gentlemen,’ he said, pulling out one of the chairs and seating himself. ‘Let’s sort our differences out in a civilised manner, over good food and wine.’ When Kammler and Nebe were also sitting, both eyeing the healthy food with a visible lack of enthusiasm, Wilson removed the bottle of wine from the ice bucket and filled up their glasses. After toasting one another, they commenced eating, talking through the meal.

‘I believe you had a complaint to make,’ Wilson said, addressing both men.

‘Yes,’ Kammler replied. ‘While my direct responsibilities are for the scientific aspects of the colony, including labour management and discipline, I believe I should still have a say in other matters.’

‘Such as?’

‘It’s not my belief that we should be negotiating with the Americans in return for their cooperation regarding supplies.’

‘How else do you propose obtaining such supplies?’

‘The way we’ve always done in the past: by stealing them and bringing them in on the saucers.’

‘The saucers aren’t yet big enough and our supplies are running out.’

‘Nevertheless,’ Kammler insisted, glancing nervously at the watchful Nebe, ‘I don’t believe we should let the West stay in the Antarctic. Nor do I believe that we should give the Americans the slightest knowledge of our technology.’

‘We don’t have a choice, Hans.’ Wilson was being patient. ‘We can’t wait until we run out of supplies and then make our trade. Once we run out of supplies, the West will have us over a barrel. We can’t let that happen.’

‘And what if those in the West, particularly the US, use the knowledge we give them to actually catch up with our technology?’

‘That simply won’t happen.’ Wilson was starting to lose patience. ‘I’ll only pass on what we’ve already superseded, which means that no matter how far they advance, we’ll always be even more advanced – light years ahead of them.’

‘I don’t think we can take that chance,’ Kammler said. ‘One of your old Projekt Saucer team, Walter Miethe, is now working for the A.V. Roe aircraft company in Malton, Ontario, helping them to construct some crude

flying saucers based on our early designs. Habermohl is doing the same for the Soviets. Werner von Braun is now working for NASA, reportedly on a long-term moon programme. As for Flugkapitän Rudolph Schriever, he's now back in his home town of Bremerhaven, West Germany, from where he's busily informing all and sundry that the Americans have their own saucers and constructed them from his designs, which is partially true. The United States now knows too much, so we shouldn't barter with them.'

'And I repeat,' Wilson said, his patience running out, 'that it can't be avoided.' Disgusted, he turned to the silent, always calculating Nebe. 'And you, Artur, what do you think?'

'I agree with Kammler. We can't take such a chance. If we want supplies, let's go and take them. With our saucers, we can bring the United States to it knees - and from there take over the whole world. Why wait so long?'

'You want power, Nebe.'

'Nothing else in life matters.'

Wilson sighed, despairing of base human nature. 'I'm not interested in power for its own sake,' he explained, 'but want only to guarantee the survival and continuing evolution of this apolitical, scientific community. Eventually, our technology will make us the dominant power anyway, without resort to pointless violence, and in the meantime, we can get what we want with minimum effort. Let the United States bring in our supplies; what we give in return will serve them well, but not enough to give them an advantage over us. We're safe from attack.'

'I'm a policeman,' Nebe said. 'That's what I'm reduced to here. I'm not a man cut out for peaceful work and long-term commitments. I'm being destroyed by boredom. I need something more to do. Let's go to war against the Americans, I say, and prove the worth of our saucers. We will soon rule the world, then.'

'You have the instincts of an animal,' Wilson said, 'and the mind of a caveman. This subject is closed.'

He saw the flash of anger in Nebe's dark, primal gaze and knew that he had struck through to a nerve that would make the man murderous. Glancing at Kammler, he saw that he too was angry, though trying to conceal it with a smile that did not reach his eyes. Wilson knew what they were after: the glory of immediate conquest. He also knew that they now wanted to get rid of him, divide the colony between them, and use the flying saucers to resurrect the Third Reich and ensure that it would finally become their

beloved Thousand Year Reich.
It was a pitiful dream, one which filled him with contempt, making him realise that these Nazis had served their only useful purpose and that the time had finally come to put an end to them. He would do it this evening.
‘Well, perhaps you’re right,’ he said. ‘The gamble may be too great. Let me sleep on it tonight and make a decision tomorrow.’
‘Excellent,’ Kammler responded, smiling, all charm, while Nebe simply stared in a stony manner, which was normal for him. Wilson raised his glass of wine in the air and smiled falsely at both men.
‘I can tell you both miss the war,’ he said. ‘Peace can often be boring. So - to the war!’ They toasted the war by touching glasses. When they had drunk, Wilson said, ‘Ah, yes, they were indeed good days.’
As sunlight stroked the frozen peaks in the bright night of Antarctica, Kammler and Nebe nostalgically recalled the days of World War II while Wilson listened, pretending to be interested, but practically twitching with impatience. When, a few hours later, after brandy and cigars, they returned to the subject of how best to deal with the outside world, Wilson pretended to agree with them and promised to let them devise a strategy for war, starting with an immediate attack on the United States, initially targeting Washington DC.
Satisfied, Kammler and Nebe retired to bed.
Understanding that no matter what he agreed to, they would eventually turn against him, Wilson had no intention of doing what they wanted. Therefore, instead of considering their request, he sat at his desk and turned on the TV screens that showed them in their separate rooms, Kammler already sleeping, Nebe naked and straddling one of the comfort girls, his bloated body heaving up and down in a joining devoid of love.
Shaking his head in disgust at what they had forced him to do, Wilson pressed a button located under his desk, releasing jets of lethal gas into their rooms - killing them exactly as they had killed so many others in the gas chambers of the Nazi concentration camps.
Kammler didn’t waken up. He died in his sleep. Nebe rolled off the girl, covering his mouth with his hands, tried to open the front door and failed, then attempted to climb through the window as the girl, also realising what was happening, started pounding on the door with her fists, obviously screaming for help. Nebe fell back from the window, rolled on the floor, clambered back up. He grabbed the girl by the hair, jerked her away from the

door, then frantically tried to pull the door open until the gas overcame him. The girl went into convulsions first, writhing naked on the bed, vomiting. Nebe slid down the door, turned away, fell forward, started crawling towards the window on his hands and knees, then collapsed face down on the floor. He went into convulsions as the girl became still, then he too vomited profusely and shuddered his way into the final stillness of death. The dense gas had become a cloud of smoke that obscured his body and made it look like a bloated, hairy animal lying on its side. That carcass did not move.

Wilson picked up his phone and called the Rubbish Disposal Unit. He ordered them to remove the bodies from rooms 2 and 3 and incinerate them and all their belongings. Then, immensely relieved and satisfied, he had a good sleep.

Chapter Nineteen

Dwight awakened from a restless, dream-haunted sleep in which he had been pursued by a flying saucer while driving from Wright-Patterson AFB to the town of Dayton. The saucer was immense, with a fiery orange-coloured base, and it came down on Dwight's car, blotting out the whole sky, to make the vehicle's engine malfunction and then swallow it whole. Dwight looked up in terror, his heart ready to burst, as the fiery orange-coloured base, now a bizarre, swirling furnace, spread out all around him and suddenly blinded him.

His scream of fear tore him loose, casting him back to the real world, and he jerked upright on the bed, opening his eyes to the morning sunlight, realising that he was covered in sweat and that Beth and Nichola were in the kitchen, having breakfast already. Breathing deeply, trying to still his racing heart, he slid off the bed, wriggled out of his soaked pyjamas, and gratefully went for a cold shower.

Feeling better after the shower, he put his uniform on and went into the kitchen. Beth and Nichola were facing each other across the dining table, having a breakfast of cornflakes, toast, orange juice and, in Beth's case, black coffee. Nichola was now six years old and as pretty as a picture. Beth, though no longer the young, longhaired beauty he had married, was still, with her short-cropped auburn hair, full lips and slim figure, an exceptionally attractive 27-year old woman. She was also a woman who spoke her mind, as Dwight knew only too well and was reminded of once more when he joined her and Nichola at the table.

‘Groaning and tossing in your sleep again,’ Beth said for openers. ‘More nightmares, Dwight.’
Dwight sighed. ‘Yeah, right.’ He helped himself to some cornflakes. ‘Sorry if I kept you awake. I wouldn’t want to disturb you.’
‘No need for sarcasm, Dwight. I was only making an observation. Those nightmares are becoming more frequent and that can’t be a good sign.’
‘I hate nightmares,’ Nichola informed them, ‘but dreams are okay. Why can’t we have ice cream for breakfast? I’m fed up with cornflakes.’
‘I’m okay,’ Dwight said, spooning his cornflakes up too quickly. ‘Everyone has nightmares from time to time. There could be lots of reasons.’
‘Like what?’
‘What do you mean?’
‘What else could be causing the nightmares? Is it *me*? Something I don’t know about? Another woman, perhaps?’
Shocked, Dwight glanced at Nichola, but clearly she wasn’t listening. She was running her finger around the inside of her upper lip while lethargically stirring the cornflakes into various shapes. ‘A duck,’ she said, addressing herself. ‘A dog. A.... Mmmmmm.’ Dwight turned back to Beth.
‘Are you serious? Is that what you think?’
She gazed steadily at him, measuring him, then lowered her eyes. ‘Well, you haven’t exactly been *attentive* lately. Not yourself at all, Dwight.’
‘I’m under a lot of pressure. You know that as well as I do. I wouldn't even have *time* for another woman, so it isn’t an issue.’
Beth reached across the table to squeeze his hand. ‘Get out from under that pressure, Dwight. Neither of us needs it. I know you tried before, but try again to get out of this work. If you can’t, leave the Air Force.’
Flushed with guilt and wanting to hide it, Dwight glanced out the window. He was guilty because he understood why Beth would be worried, but when he looked outside, at the planes parked on the airstrip in the inky shadow of the great hangars, wing-flaps and hangar doors shuddering in the August wind, he knew that he couldn’t live without the Air Force and become a civilian. Also (and the thought of this made him feel even worse), though Project Blue Book was certainly putting pressure on and giving him nightmares, it was also exerting a dreadful fascination that he couldn’t resist. It wasn’t ordinary work, after all.
‘I can’t eat what’s left,’ Nichola said. ‘They’re too mushy and messy.’
‘That’s ‘cause you made them that way stirring them,’ Beth retorted.

‘I was drawing with my spoon,’ Nichola explained.
Dwight placed his free hand on Beth’s wrist. ‘I can’t leave the Air Force. What would I do out there? I’m in it for life. Besides, it isn’t as bad as you think. Half the things you hear about UFOs are nonsense. Hysteria and wishful thinking have a lot to do with it. You know? The planet Venus, comets, meteors, clouds, plasmoids, corona discharges, parhelia and paraselenae, the sun and moon and stars, even lightning and birds, can all look like bright, solid objects moving at high speed. So people see those, misinterpret what they see, then hysteria or wishful thinking comes into play. As for the UFOs being flown by extraterrestrial beings... well, maybe they’re not. Maybe they’re just some kind of extraterrestrial phenomena - a kind of mirage. We’re frightened of what we can’t understand, so we tend to exaggerate.’
‘That doesn’t stop your nightmares, Dwight. Also, you’re losing weight. We hardly ever see you anymore, and when you’re here, you’re not here – you’re at the ATIC in your thoughts, still beavering away there.’
‘The nightmares will go away with time. I’m pretty damned sure of that.’
‘Look, Dwight, I don’t know if we’re being invaded by flying saucers or not. I only know that my husband is having bad nightmares, is losing weight, and is often too exhausted and distracted to even make love to me. I’m worried about that and also about your future. You say you’re an Air Force lifer - well, I agree with that - but that being so, what’s going to happen to you if they consistently deny you promotion, as they seem to be doing,? We both know why that is, Dwight. It’s nothing to do with your competence. It’s because most of those who get involved with UFOs are given a hard time. You should have been in charge of Project Blue Book, but Ruppelt got it instead. Now there are rumours that Ruppelt’s in trouble and may get pushed out. That’s the way it runs, Dwight.’
‘They’re just rumours,’ Dwight said, though he thought they might be true. ‘Some folks talk too much. We all know that today the official recommendations of the Robertson panel will be released, and that knowledge has encouraged a lot of wild speculation, mostly to do with the fate of Project Blue Book in general and Captain Ruppelt in particular. They’re just rumours, Beth.’
‘It isn’t a rumour that you’ve been repeatedly denied promotion from as far back as Project Sign. Before that you were everybody’s darling; since then they’ve made all kinds of excuses to put other, less experienced officers in

front of you. Those aren't rumours, Dwight. And it isn't just a rumour that a lot of people involved in UFO investigations have had even worse things to contend with, such as being posted to Alaska or even having bad, inexplicable, sometimes fatal accidents, like that World War Two hero and UFO expert, Mike Bradley, and his unfortunate wife.'

Dwight gulped the last of his coffee and then put on his Air Force captain's tunic. 'There's no proof for that,' he lied, looking guiltily from Beth to Nichola, secretly convinced that he was placing both of them in danger and feeling bad because of it. 'It's just more wild speculation.'

'Oh, yeah? Then how do you explain the men in black?'

Dwight had been about to kiss Beth on the cheek, but her words stopped him, making him straighten up again, feeling a chill wind pass through him.

'What do you know about the men in black?' he asked.

'Lots of gossip, Dwight. I prefer to call them stories. Folks are talking about people involved in UFO investigations receiving visits from groups of men dressed all in black. Some say they wear black suits. Others say they're coveralls. Most agree that they're not with the Air Force and though human seem strange. Unusually pale, folks say. Oddly inexpressive faces. They usually visit in twos or threes, generally arrive in a black limousine, and always warn those they've come to see to stop discussing or investigating UFOs. They tell them that if they continue to do so, they'll find themselves in real trouble.'

'More tall stories,' Dwight said, though in fact he had been receiving an increasing number of such stories, many from reliable sources. 'These tall tales spread like wildfire. You believe all that garbage?'

'I'm only telling you what I heard,' Beth replied cagily, though certainly not joking. 'Most of these stories come from pretty reliable sources - mostly Air Force personnel - and some came from folk who had the visitors themselves, ignored what they were told, then got into serious trouble shortly after. In at least one case, the person who received the visitors and told Adele Walters about it - saying he thought it was a hoax - later vanished and hasn't been seen since.'

'If it was a friend of Adele's, it could only have been Ben Little,' Dwight informed her.

Little was an amateur astronomer and fanatical UFOlogist, resident right here in Dayton, who had frequently, perhaps too loudly, claimed that the flying saucers could be man-made secret weapons of the US and Canadian

governments. After receiving a lot of local press coverage for a couple of days, Little had just upped and disappeared, leaving a wife and three kids. Adele's husband, Ralph Walters, an Air Force Flight engineer, was a close family friend.

'Yeah, that's the one. Obviously, you heard about it, Dwight.'

'Yes. And I also heard that the marriage was in trouble and that Ben Little may simply have fled the coop. I lean towards that hypothesis.'

'I bet,' Beth said. She had his number and he knew it. Though he simply couldn't admit it even to himself, he believed that something bad had happened to the loudmouthed Ben Little and that the mysterious 'men in black' had something to do with it. He now believed that the 'men in black' existed; he just didn't know who they were. Extraterrestrials? The CIA? Foreign agents? There was no way of knowing.

Trying to hide the shock that Beth's knowledge had given him, he leaned down and kissed her on the cheek. 'See you later,' he said. Then he kissed Nichola on the forehead, tickled her under the armpits, and left her giggling hysterically as he hurried out of the house, to walk the short distance to the ATIC, across the airstrip of Wright Field.

The ATIC operations room was not as spartan as it had been during Project Sign. Now, a lot of UFO photographs and drawings of their 'alien' occupants had been added to the many incident maps, charts and graphs on the walls. The two teletype machines hardly ever stopped clicking and the single secretarial assistant, WAC corporal Thelma Wheeler, was now a sergeant with a couple of other secretaries under her command.

Though putting on a little weight, Thelma was still blonde and pretty. She had eyes only for Captain Bob Jackson, who had somehow managed to carry on an affair with her for years without actually tying the knot, let alone becoming engaged. Even now, as Dwight entered the cluttered room, Bob was sitting on the edge of Thelma's desk, leaning towards her and whispering into her ear. Thelma burst into giggles and slapped Bob's knee, then turned away by swivelling around in her chair and went back to her expert typewriting. Bob looked up, saw Dwight and stopped smiling, so Dwight knew the news was bad.

'Morning,' he said, approaching Bob. 'I take it from the look on your face that the recommendations of the Robertson panel have come through.'

'Yeah,' Bob replied. 'I don't know what's in the report, but Ruppelt doesn't look happy and said we were to go straight in and see him as soon as you got

here.’
‘Then let’s go in, Bob.’
Seated behind his desk, Ruppelt, in his Air Force uniform, still looked like a darkhaired adolescent whose slightly plump, smoothly handsome face showed decency and good humour. Nevertheless, gazing down at the thick folder on his desk, he was clearly not in a good-humoured mood and, indeed, looked decidedly troubled - so much so, in fact, that he didn’t notice their arrival and was only distracted from the report when Dwight said, ‘Morning, Cap’n Ruppelt. I believe you wanted to see us.’
Ruppelt glanced up as if confused, trying to collect his thoughts, then he smiled as if it was something of an effort, indicating that Dwight and Bob should take the chairs at the other side of his desk. When they had done so, he glanced down at the Robertson panel report, then looked up again and spread his hands over the file as if casting a net.
‘What can I say?’ he asked rhetorically. ‘Where do I start?’
‘Just come out with it, Cap’n,’ Dwight said. ‘It’ll be easier for all of us.’
‘It’s not good.’
‘They’ve shafted us,’ Bob said bluntly. ‘Is that what you’re saying?’
‘Yes, Bob, I’m afraid it is.’ Ruppelt massaged his forehead with his fingers, glanced distractedly at the file, and then looked up again. ‘I should warn you that this isn’t the full report. It’s merely a summary of their major recommendations.’
‘So when are we getting the full report?’ Dwight asked him.
‘We’re not. We’re only getting what they want us to know and this is it, gentlemen.’
‘What...?’ Dwight began, glancing at the equally shocked Bob.
‘Don’t ask me,’ Ruppelt said wearily, then lowered his head again, to scan the document. ‘First, despite the conclusive evidence offered by me and Major Fournet, the members of the panel have concluded that the evidence is *not* substantial, that the continued emphasis on the reporting of the phenomena is resulting in - I quote - *a threat to the orderly functioning of the protective organs of the body politic* - unquote - and that the continuing UFO reports are clogging military channels, could possibly precipitate mass hysteria, and might encourage defence personnel to misidentify or ignore actual enemy aircraft. In other words: the real problem isn’t the UFOs – it’s the UFO *reports.*’
‘That much I knew already,’ Dwight said. ‘What bothers me is what they’ve

recommended.'
'It's pretty startling,' Ruppelt said. He glanced at the many posters on the walls around his desk, mostly enlargements of frames from cinetheodolite movies or stills taken with amateur cameras, the UFOs mostly no more than blurred, round-shaped objects. He appeared to be trying to take some solace from them, though not with success. Sighing, he went back to the report. 'As I say, based on the assessment, the Robertson panel has made some unexpected, even startling, recommendations.'
'Ho, ho,' Bob whispered.
'First, it's recommended that the three major private UFO organizations - the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization, or APRO, the Civilian Saucer Intelligence, or CSI, and Dr Frederick Epstein's Aerial Phenomena Investigations Institute, or APII - be watched because of what's described as their potentially great influence on mass thinking in the event of widespread sightings. Included in this recommendation is the statement: "The apparent irresponsibility and the possible use of such groups for subversive purposes should be kept in mind".'
'Jesus Christ!' Bob exclaimed.
'Next, it recommends that the national security agencies take immediate steps to strip the UFO phenomenon of its importance and eliminate the *aura of mystery* that it's acquired. The means will include a so-called *public education programme*.'
'Mass brainwashing,' Bob translated bitterly.
'Finally, the panel has outlined a programme of public education' - Bob snorted contemptuously – 'with two purposes: training and debunking. The former will help people identify known objects and thus reduce the mass of reports caused by misidentification; the latter will reduce public interest in UFOs and thereby decrease or eliminate UFO reports altogether.'
'Shove it under the carpet,' Bob translated.
'As a means of pursuing this so-called education programme,' Captain Ruppelt continued sombrely, ignoring Bob's outraged interjections, 'the panel's suggested that the government hire psychologists familiar with mass psychology, military training film companies, Walt Disney Productions, and popular personalities such as Arthur Godfrey, to subtly convey this new thinking to the masses. It's also recommended that the sighting reports should *not* be declassified, but that security should be tightened even more while all so-called non-military personnel should still be denied access to

our UFO files.’
Ruppelt stopped scanning the report and looked at Dwight and Bob in turn. After a tense silence, he said, ‘Interpreting these recommendations the only way possible, it seems clear to me that the whole purpose of the Robertson Panel has been to enable the Air Force to state for the next decade or so that an *impartial* body had examined the UFO data and found no evidence for anything unusual in the skies.’
‘Damn right,’ Bob said bitterly.
‘While this is an obvious distortion of fact, it means that the Air Force can now avoid discussing the nature of the objects and instead concentrate on the public relations campaign to eliminate the UFO reports totally. In other words, Project Blue Book is finished. If it continues under that name, it won’t be as we know it.’
‘No,’ Dwight said, ‘it won’t. Project Blue Book’s going to become responsible for a policy of ridicule and denial that’ll inhibit the effectiveness of any future study of the phenomena. It’ll now be just another arm of the Robertson panel’s CIA-backed propaganda campaign.’
‘Those bastards,’ Bob said.
Though clearly not happy, Ruppelt smiled at him, then he turned the report over, picked up some other pages, and spread them out on his desk as if they were dirt.
‘I’m afraid, gentlemen, that while the deliberately leaked Robertson panel report recommends the dropping of all secrecy and the expansion of Project Blue Book’s staff, in the official report, from which this summary has been extracted, they’ve actually recommended a tightening of security, a mass debunking of the phenomena, a subtle ridicule of witnesses, and... the virtual elimination of all the Project Blue Book staff.’
‘Oh, my God!’ Bob said, practically groaning.
Ignoring him, but sounding choked up, Ruppelt said, ‘The following are being posted elsewhere.’ Lowering his head and sounding even more choked, he read off the list of names of those being posted. The list included him. The only people left were Dwight, Bob, and Thelma Wheeler.
‘The original three,’ Ruppelt pointed out. ‘You’re now in charge, Dwight.’
‘Of what? They’ve left me in charge of a pile of shit.’
‘It sure smells that way,’ Bob said.
Ruppelt stood up and put on his peaked cap. ‘I knew this last night, so I’ve already packed my kit. They told me I had to leave immediately and that’s

what I’m doing. My bags are out in the jeep and I’m leaving right now. It was my pleasure knowing you, gentlemen. I’m just sorry it’s ended this way.’

‘So am I,’ Dwight said.

He and Bob followed Ruppelt out of his office and into the main room, where the latter called the staff together and painfully read out the instructions for their postings. When the shocked staff had taken in the news, he walked around shaking hands with each of them in turn, clearly embarrassed when some of the girls shed tears. After shaking the last hand, he indicated that Dwight and Bob should escort him to the front door of the ATIC building. Outside, on the veranda, with the planes taking off, landing, and roaring in low over the runway and hangars, he stared intently at both of them.

‘They’re trying to grind you down,’ he said, ‘and they might well succeed, but in the meantime, here are a few questions for you to answer.’ He spread his hands in the air and started raising each finger in turn as he ticked off the questions. ‘Why, when the Air Force was telling the whole world that the study of UFOs hadn’t produced enough evidence to warrant investigation, did they secretly order all reports to be investigated? Why, when all of us had actually read General Twining’s statement that the phenomenon was something real, did they deny that such a statement had ever been submitted? Why, when they themselves initiated Project Sign and received its official report concluding that the UFOs were of extraterrestrial origin, did they dissolve the project and then burn the report? Why, when Project Sign was changed to Project Grudge, did they go all out to ridicule the reported sightings and then disperse most of the staff on the project? Why, when the Air Force continued to claim that they had absolutely no interest in UFOs, did they insist that all reports be sent to the Pentagon? Finally, why did the CIA lie to us, why has the Robertson Report been kept from us, and why has Project Blue Book been destroyed? Those questions need to be answered, gentlemen, and you’re the only ones left. Goodbye... and good luck!’

He saluted and walked down to his jeep and then drove out of their lives.

‘I don’t believe this,’ Dwight said.

Chapter Twenty

Ernst Stoll was disgusted by the reflection in the mirror. He had aged since coming here, his features now gaunt, skin yellowish from bad food and

lack of activity, eyes losing their lustre. Realising just how much the jungle was taking its toll, he cursed under his breath and called for his comfort girl, Maria, to bring him coffee. She did so quickly, padding towards him on bare feet, her face bruised from the beating he had given her last night when his latest sexual innovations had failed to produce the desired result. That, too, was disappearing - his potency, his damned manhood - and when he glanced again in the mirror to see Maria retreating nervously from him, leaving his steaming cup of coffee on the table just behind him, he realised that she knew this all too well and might be talking about it. Feeling even more humiliated, he decided to get rid of her, and started pondering how best to do it as he wiped his face with a towel.

Then the mirror shook a little, bouncing off the wall, making his already fractured image move out of the frame and back in again.

Steadying the mirror with his free hand, Ernst finished drying his face, then put the towel down and felt the floor shaking under his feet as a familiar bass humming sound filled the room, emanating from outside. Realising that they had arrived earlier than expected, he hurriedly buttoned up his shirt, slipped on his boots, and started across the room.

Maria was on her hands and knees, polishing the wooden floorboards with a waxed cloth. A local Indian girl, but the illegitimate daughter of a white man who had discarded her, she had barely turned seventeen, which was the age Ernst liked them. Right now, her naked body was clearly visible through the thin cotton dress, where it tightened over her raised rump and curved spine. Ernst felt a wave of the lust that was rarely satisfied these days, so he angrily pressed his booted foot on her spine and pressed her face down on the floor. The bass humming sound filled the room, making the floors and walls shake, but Ernst could still feel the trembling of the girl under his booted foot. He had the urge to crush her spine, thus releasing his frustration, but instead he took his pleasure from the fear he could hear in her voice.

‘Please, master,’ she whimpered.

He pressed harder with his boot, heard her soft groan of pain, laughed and removed his boot from her spine, then left the house.

Outside, on the veranda, the bass humming sound was louder, almost palpable, an odd vibration that shook the building. He looked up to see a 300-foot-diameter flying saucer descending vertically, slowly, onto the landing pad that now took up most of the ground in the immense walled enclosure in front of the house.

The craft descending was an object of such beauty that it nearly brought a lump to Ernst's throat, reminding him of what he had lost when sidetracked from aeronautical engineering to become an SS policeman. Still high up in the air and viewed by Ernst from almost directly below, the saucer was spinning rapidly on its own axis, except for the central part, which was stationary. It was, he knew, constructed like a giant meniscus lens, or like two inverted plates, that were rotating around the dome-shaped, gyroscopically stabilised central fuselage containing the control cabin, passenger accommodations and supplies. Driven by an advanced electromagnetic propulsion system that ionised the surrounding air and created an electrical conducting field, the saucer was not hindered by normal heat and drag; it therefore had remarkable lift while being devoid of sonic booms or other noises, other than the infrasound that seemed almost palpable.

The rapid rotation of the great outer rings slowed down as the saucer descended, but its electromagnetic gravity-damping system - which also aided its lift and ability to hover almost motionless in the air - was creating violent currents of air within a cylindrical zone the same width as the saucer, making the grass and plants flutter, sucking up loose soil and gravel, and causing them to spin wildly, noisily, in the air as if caught in the eye of a hurricane.

The native workers who lived in the shacks located around the inner edge of the compound were standing outside their modest homes, untouched by the whirlpool of wind that did not extend beyond the cylindrical zone of the saucer, which made it seem magical. They were looking up in awe as the gigantic saucer descended, pointing and chattering to express their disbelief, even though they had seen it many times before.

Ernst felt a lump in his throat as the saucer descended to almost ground level, filling up most of the compound, its central dome as high as a two-storey building. Composed of an electrically charged, minutely porous magnesium orthosilicate, it had a whitish glow caused by the ionisation, but it darkened to a more normal metallic grey as it hovered just above ground level, its hydraulic legs emerging from four points around the base to embed themselves in the soft earth. The saucer bounced gently on the legs, but eventually settled down and was still. Its rotating rings gradually slowed and then stopped altogether, as did the wind that had been created by its gravity-damping system. Silence reigned for a moment.

Still standing on his veranda, Ernst was deeply moved and embittered simultaneously. He should have helped to construct that saucer, flown it, been part of it, but instead he was condemned to this hellish jungle, rounding up Ache Indians and haggling shamelessly with *Federales* instead of using his engineering talents for work in the Antarctic colony. He had been chosen for this and must do it, but it still deeply wounded him.

With the outer rings of the saucer no longer rotating, the infrasound faded away and a panel in the concave base dropped down on hinged arms to form a ramp leading to the ground. Armed guards wearing black coveralls emerged to form a protective ring around the ramp, then Wilson appeared, dressed completely in black, followed by more armed guards, dressed in black also.

Ernst stepped off the porch and went to greet his master. When Wilson shook his hand, Ernst was startled by how youthful he looked. Though he was now over eighty, his silvery-grey hair was abundant, his skin was smooth on a handsome, ascetic face, and his eyes were as blue and icily clear as the Antarctic sky. The only giveaway, Ernst noticed, was in the slight rigidity to his features when he attempted to smile and, perhaps, a slight stiffness to his movements.

‘How are you, Ernst?’ he asked, his voice no warmer than his icy gaze.

‘I’m fine, sir. And you?’

‘All the operations so far have been successful. Doctors Eckhardt and Gold are making good progress. By having the courage to let them try things out on me, I’ve kept old age at bay.’

Though aware that the good doctors Eckhardt and Gold always tried things out on unfortunate live subjects before operating on Wilson, Ernst thought it wise to pass no comment.

‘I’m afraid we can’t stay for long,’ Wilson continued. ‘We’ll simply collect the livestock, then be on our way again. You and I can have a quick talk while Porter’ - he indicated the armed, black-uniformed brute behind him – ‘sees to the Indians. All right, Porter, get started.’

Realising that for the first time Kammler and Nebe were not with Wilson, Ernst waited until the burly Porter had marched off to the cages with a group of his armed thugs before asking about the whereabouts of his former, detested, World War II comrades.

‘They’re dead,’ Wilson said indifferently, taking a seat at one side of the low table on the veranda. ‘An unfortunate accident. They went together in a

saucer to collect supplies left by the Americans at the other side of the mountain range. The saucer malfunctioned and crashed, killing everyone on board. Kammler and Nebe are no more.'

Even though he had detested Kammler and deeply feared Nebe, Ernst was shocked to hear of their passing. Nevertheless, after calling out for Maria to bring tea, he saw a ray of hope in his darkness. 'So what will you do now that they're gone? Surely you need someone experienced to replace them and help run the colony. Surely, I – '

'No,' Wilson said, instantly crushing his hopes. 'I know what you're going to suggest, Ernst, but it isn't possible right now. I can run the colony on my own. Your work here is more important. We can't do without a constant supply of Ache Indians, so we can't do without your presence here. You have done truly excellent work in opening up and maintaining lines of communication between General Stroessner and us. Those lines must not be broken. As Stroessner will almost certainly become the next President of Paraguay - probably within the next few months – it's important that you remain here to offer him support and strengthen the alliance between us. In time, I promise, you'll return to the colony, but right now your presence here is vital.'

Torn between pride and his suspicion that Wilson was lying and intended keeping him here forever, Ernst shifted uneasily in his chair. He compensated for his disappointment and deepening depression by barking angrily at Maria who, when she emerged from the house to pour their tea, spilt some onto the saucers.

'Her hands were shaking badly,' Wilson noted when Maria had backed nervously into the house. 'Is she frightened of you?'

'Yes,' Ernst said. 'During the war I learnt that fear could work miracles, so I make sure that everyone's frightened of me.'

'Very good,' Wilson said, though it was impossible to tell if he meant it or not, so unemotional, almost toneless, was his soft voice. 'And is the round-up of the Indians trouble-free?'

'Yes,' Ernst replied. 'The *Federales* do it for me. I merely stay in touch with them, tell them what I want, haggle like an Arab about the price, then let them get on with it. They know the jungle; also, they've been hunting the Ache for years, so they know what they're doing. Naturally, as you can imagine, they're ruthless, which makes them effective.'

'Any problems holding the prisoners in the compound?'

‘No. The *Federales* don’t bring the prisoners here until I give them a date, which is usually the day before you arrive. If the *Federales* round them up too early, they have to look after them for me and I’m sure they get certain benefits out of that - if you get my meaning.’
‘I do,’ Wilson replied, not mentioning rape or other forms of abuse, but registering a slight distaste for the low appetites of the still primitive human race. ‘So they’re only in your cages a short time?’
‘Correct.’ Even as Ernst spoke, Wilson’s black-uniformed troops were opening the gates of the bamboo cages at one side of the compound and starting to herd out the terrified Ache Indians, men, women and children, to march them at gunpoint across the compound and up into the saucer by another, wider ramp that had since been lowered from the base. Looking up at the towering saucer, some of the Indians were terrified, started gibbering or covering their eyes with their hands, then tried either to break out of the column or turn back. When they did so, however, Wilson’s men in black hammered them brutally with the butts of their weapons and forced them onward again.
I seem to have spent half my life watching people being herded at gunpoint from one form of imprisonment to another, Ernst thought, recalling the Jews in the cattle trucks in Poland and Germany, all fodder for another great dream. Masters and slaves, indeed.
‘The last time we spoke,’ Ernst said, ‘you were making a deal with the Americans in return for supplies. I take it from the fate of Kammler and Nebe that you now have an agreement with the United States.’
‘Yes, Ernst. They drop what we want at the far side of the mountain range and our saucers pick it up and bring it home. In return for this, I feed them titbits of our technology - though never enough to put us in any danger from them. They’ve also agreed to the late Artur Nebe’s suggestion for a long-term programme of disinformation based on a mixture of ridicule and intimidation of UFO witnesses, both civilian and military.’
‘I’ve been reading about that Robertson panel in American newspapers and assumed that it might be a threat to you.’
Wilson gave one of his rare chuckles of pleasure. ‘All part of a planned, CIA-backed programme of disinformation. Even though the Project Blue Book evidence on UFOs proved conclusively that the saucers exist, the panel stated in their report that the evidence *wasn’t* substantial, that the continued emphasis on the reporting of the phenomena was resulting in a threat to the

orderly functioning of the protective organs of the body politic, and that the reports clogged military channels, could possibly precipitate mass hysteria, and might encourage defence personnel to misidentify or ignore actual enemy aircraft. Naturally, as the United States has just finished fighting the war in Korea, the Soviets have exploded their first hydrogen bomb, and the Cold War is presently at its chilliest, the American public, and the top brass of the armed forces, swallowed that all too readily.'

This man is truly a genius, Ernst thought, helplessly swelling up with admiration. There is nothing he can't do.

'What will the immediate results of this be?' he asked.

'We've already had the results, Ernst. Last August, the Pentagon issued Air Force Regulation 200-2, which the civilian UFO organisations are already describing as notorious.'

'For good reason?'

'Of course. Drafted purely as a public relations weapon, AFR 200-2 prohibits the release of *any* information about a UFO sighting to the public or media, except when the sighting is positively identified as a *natural* phenomenon. In addition, while AFR 200-5, the previous regulation, stated that sightings should not be classified higher than restricted, the new regulation ensures that *all* sightings will be classified as restricted. Then, in December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff followed AFR 200-2 with Joint-ArmyNavy Air Force Publication 146, which made the releasing of any information to the public a crime under the Espionage Act, punishable by a one-to-ten-year prison term or a fine of ten-thousand dollars. Even better, the most ominous aspect of JANAP 146 - at least from the point of view of those who might fall foul of it - is that it applies to anyone who knows of its existence, even including commercial airline pilots.'

'In other words,' Ernst said, 'to all intents and purposes, and contrary to public Air Force pronouncements, the UFO project has been plunged into secrecy.'

'Correct.'

'It's nice to be protected by our enemies,' Ernst said.

'*Very* nice,' Wilson replied with a slight, chilly smile, gazing out from the veranda to where the Ache Indians were being herded at gunpoint from the cages to the flying saucer. Often they became hysterical when they were actually under its wide base, at the foot of the sloping ramp, but they always scurried up the ramp when they were thumped by rifle butts or, as Ernst now

noted, by small metallic devices strapped by the wrist to the knuckles of some of the troops. When the troops merely touched the Indians with such devices, the latter screamed in pain.
‘What are they?’ Ernst asked.
‘Experimental stun guns,’ Wilson replied. ‘At the moment, they do no more than give severe electrical shocks - not severe enough to kill, but certainly enough to burn and hurt. But soon we’ll be able to use them to stun, as well as merely hurt, and eventually, with fine tuning, they can be used as mesmerising devices when applied to certain points on the anatomy. Time will bring us everything.’
Ernst felt the great wave of his loss rolling over him to wash him away. Trembling, he finished his tea, placed the cup back on the saucer, and wiped his lips with the back of his hand.
‘I only wish I could be part of it,’ he said, secretly wanting to scream for release, but too frightened to do so. ‘I mean, being here... this jungle... these filthy natives... I feel like an outcast. I was trained to be an engineer, a scientist, and yet now...’
In a rare gesture of affection, Wilson placed his hand gently on Ernst’s wrist. ‘No, Ernst, never think that. Such thoughts are for common people. It’s vanity that makes you talk this way, and you should be above it. As individuals, we are nothing. Our desires are mere conceits. We only exist to serve the whole, which is past and future combined. You must suppress your own desires, cast off ephemeral needs, and learn to take pride from your small part in life’s grander purpose. Man is still essentially animal. His only true worth is in the mind. The mind is the doorway to immortality and the secrets of being. You are part of that, Ernst. What you do here has its purpose. Like a monk in a monastery, like a hermit in his cave, like a mystic contemplating in his mountain eyrie, you will learn to accept this. Discipline brings freedom. Self-sacrifice brings fulfilment. What you lost in the past - your career, your wife and children, your hopes for the Third Reich - and what you feel you’re losing now - the comradeship and esteem of your fellow engineers in Antarctica – you’ll get back multiplied when what you are doing here has been completed and you see the results of it. Then, and only then, will I bring you back to the Antarctic. When I do so, you’ll be twice the man you are now - ennobled by knowledge. Believe me, Ernst. Eventually this will come to pass and then you will thank me.’
Desperate to believe him, needing the healing hands of hope, Ernst tried to

forget his lost wife, children, early ambitions and dreams - and all else in his dark, squandered history. Trembling, he picked the bell up from the table and violently rang it, calling for Maria.
‘Yes,’ he said, startled at how deeply he had been shaken by Wilson’s softly spoken, unemotional, mesmeric monologue. ‘As always, you’re absolutely right. All else is vanity.’
When Maria appeared on the veranda, trembling as much as Ernst, he thought of how often he had forced her obedience by threatening to put a bullet into her mother - there and then, right in front of her. Naturally, it had always worked - a child’s love knows no reason - but even that threat was unlikely to stop idle gossip. Vanity: yes, it was a dreadful human vice, but one he had not yet learnt to conquer when it came to his potency. To preserve her mother’s life, Maria had submitted to every one of his vile demands - unimaginable sexual activities, not mere vice, beyond pornography - and yet none of it, certainly in the past weeks, had helped him to find release. Now, Maria was bound to talk - silence would be impossible for her - and when Ernst imagined the talk spreading around the compound workers, all of whom loathed and feared him, he could not bear the thought of the humiliation he would then surely suffer.
They would thrive on his failure.
‘Yes, master,’ Maria said, falling to her knees before him, lowering her head, and not daring to look at him without permission. Ernst thought of all she had done to protect her mother and finally knew what would pleasure him.
‘Please take her with the others,’ he said to Wilson. ‘She cannot be trusted.’
‘Of course,’ Wilson said.
As Maria, sobbing and pleading, was dragged into the great saucer by the armed men in black, and her mother, also sobbing and pleading, was dragged back into her shack by some other Indian women, Wilson stood up and squeezed Ernst’s shoulder, then shook his hand.
‘Don’t worry, we’ll put her to good use. Now I must be off, Ernst. Thank you. You’re doing excellent work here. Take your pride from that knowledge.’
‘I will.’
‘Until the next time, *Auf Wedersehen*.’
‘*Auf Wedersehen*,’ Ernst said.
The lump returned to his throat when the great saucer took off, rising slowly, vertically, until it was the size of a silver coin, reflecting the sun. There it

hovered for a moment, a silver coin spinning, then it suddenly shot off to the south and vanished in seconds, blinking out like a light bulb.
When the flying saucer had gone, Ernst looked around the compound, taking note of the shadows being cast by the soaring trees, the awe-struck eyes of the native workers, unwashed, in tattered rags, the pigs in their muddy pens, the chickens frantically flapping wings, the naked children rolling in mud and water silvered by sunlight, the guards at the machine-guns in the towers that looked out over the jungle. Choking up with despair instead of pride, he turned back into the house, desperately needing a drink. Without Wilson, he took his strength from the bottle and yearned for escape.
He just couldn't admit it.

Chapter Twenty-One

On the evening of March 7, 1954, Jack Fuller drove along the ten-mile causeway that led from Patrick Air Force Base, Cape Canaveral, Florida, across the Banana River, Merritt Island and the Indian River, to the Starlite Motel in Cocoa Beach, located in the swampy lands around the original village and now a rapidly growing town of ten thousand souls. From here dozens of missiles, as well as *Explorer 1*, America's first earth satellite, had been fired into space. Many of the motels in the area had been given appropriate names - the Vanguard, the Sea Missile, the Celestial Trailer Court - but the Starlite had gone one better by having a flashing neon rocket as its roadside sign, which made it easy for Fuller to find it. Amused by the sign, he was further amused when shown into his room, where the floor lamp was shaped like a rocket with its nose cone balancing a globular satellite, the walls were decorated with celestial crescents, spheres and orbital paths, and even the towels were embroidered with the legend, 'Starlite Motel'.

'Oh, boy,' Fuller said as he tipped the crew-cut kid who showed him to his room, 'it's a whole different ball game here.'
'It sure is,' the kid said.
Fuller had a shower, shaved, changed his clothes and then went to meet Wilson in the Starlite motel's bar. He was not surprised when it turned out to be a dimly lit, L-shaped room with murals showing the moon as seen through a telescope and Earth as seen from the moon. Nor was he surprised to find that Wilson was already there, drinking what looked like lemonade. He had always been punctual.
Fuller ordered a whisky-and-water from the barman, waited until he had it,

then joined Wilson at his table. He was startled to see how young Wilson looked. He seemed to get younger every year, though in this dim lighting it was difficult to ascertain whether or not he'd had more plastic surgery.
He was studying the drinks menu, but when Fuller joined him, he looked up and smiled coldly.
'The town of Cocoa Beach,' he informed Fuller, 'has clearly become obsessed with space. What's that you're drinking?'
'Whisky with water.'
'I note that the drinks include a Countdown - ten parts vodka to one part vermouth - and a Marstini. Being here is like being in Disneyland, but it's all about space.'
'Yeah,' Fuller agreed, 'I know what you mean. They have a women's bridge club called Missile Misses, a Miss Satellite contest, a fishing boat called Miss L. Ranger, a settlement called Satellite Beach, and even a museum, the Spacarium, that has burnedout components of Cape Canaveral rockets on display. Also, not ignoring the launch of *Explorer 1*, the Chamber of Commerce is already accepting reservations for space aboard what it's describing as the first globe-circling satellite. That's American knowhow.'
'It's always nice to meet a patriot.'
'I'm not ashamed of it,' Fuller said. 'The fact that I have to deal with you doesn't change that one jot. What name are you travelling under this time?'
'Aldridge,' Wilson said. He put the menu down, sipped some lemonade, then added, 'This is certainly an encouraging place for a patriot.'
'Sure is,' Fuller agreed. He had spent the previous night in Patrick Air Force Base, two miles from Cape Canaveral, and was still thrilled by the concept of dozens of Atlas, Thor, Titan and Snark missiles, as well as the orbiting satellite, being launched from that restricted military zone of about fifteen-thousand square acres, much of it in uncleared jungle where deer and puma still roamed wild. Now, the formerly untouched land of sand dunes, palmettos, orange groves and swamps had a rapidly swelling population, scores of new businesses, and many housing developments, containing the fourteen thousand people now employed at Cape Canaveral and Patrick Air Force base.
'Cocoa Beach,' Wilson said, 'was once a small village of a few dozen families, but it's presently in the process of becoming the US government's largest and most important rocket-launching site.'
'This bothers you?'

‘Yes.’ Wilson glanced at the cosmic murals on the dimly lit walls, then shook his head from side to side, as if baffled by the childishness of it all. ‘Of course for me there’s a certain irony in the fact that most of the rockets being fired from here could not have been constructed without the assistance of Wernher von Braun and his other Nazi scientists, who in turn based their work on the theories of Robert H.Goddard and me - both neglected Americans.’

‘Ah, gee, the man’s bitter!’ Fuller said. ‘My heart’s breaking for him.’

‘I could break your mind and body,’ Wilson rejoindered, ‘and don’t ever forget it.’

The icy remove in his voice made the threat even more chilling, but Fuller was not a man to be easily frightened, so he just grinned and sipped his drink. ‘So,’ he said, placing his glass back on the table, ‘why are you here?’

‘I thought I’d check on the progress being made here and, if necessary, slow it down.’

‘I don’t know why you’re concerned. As you just said yourself, what we’re achieving here couldn’t have been done without your assistance.’

‘I dole that out carefully. You know why I do so. If NASA moves ahead more quickly than I deem fitting, I’ll take firm measures to slow them down. I won’t let you trick me.’ Fuller couldn’t suppress his pleasure. ‘Boys will be boys and scientists will be scientists. You know that if you give us assistance, we’re bound to try and exploit it. You’ve known that all along.’

‘Never imagine that you’re ahead of me,’ Wilson warned him. ‘If you do, I’ll be forced to prove you wrong - and that could be expensive.’

‘I know damned well how ruthless you can be,’ Fuller said, keeping his gaze on Wilson’s face, though relieved that his remorseless, icy eyes could not be seen too clearly in the gloom. ‘You don’t have to remind me.’

‘I *would* remind you that your own organisation, the CIA, with or without the full knowledge of the government, can also be fairly ruthless - as shown by the murder of various American citizens, such as Mike Bradley and his wife, who knew too much about me, my base in the Antarctic, and the US-Canadian saucer projects. Those murders were not committed for my benefit. Nor did I commit them. How ironic that Mr Bradley was frightened of me... when it was you who murdered him in the end.’

‘A casualty of war,’ Fuller said, proud to have done his duty, ‘and not one to give you cause for concern. You didn’t come here to talk about that, Wilson - sorry, *Aldridge* - so what do you want?’

‘A week ago the United States exploded a thermonuclear bomb over a lagoon at Bikini Atoll, thus dangerously contaminating seven thousand square miles of land and sea, injuring people nearly a hundred miles away from the area, and, even worse, making the world fall-out conscious for the first time. That test explosion, combined with the unseemly haste with which you’re expanding Cocoa Beach and Cape Canaveral, makes me suspect that certain people in the Pentagon or the White House are no longer taking my threats seriously. If you don’t slow down your rate of scientific progress, particularly regarding the Apollo space programme, I may have to give you another demonstration of my own, still much greater, capabilities.’
‘We must be catching up with you,’ Fuller said calmly. ‘Otherwise you wouldn't be so damned worried.’
‘I don’t worry, Fuller. I simply apply reason. And when that tells me you need some kind of warning, I’ll make sure you get one.’
‘Okay, I’ve been warned. I’ll take your message back to those in charge and I’m sure they’ll take heed. Anything else?’
‘Not really. I take it that UFO witnesses are still being harassed, ridiculed and thwarted at every turn?’
‘Correct.’
‘What’s the state of Project Blue Book?’
‘Not good, you’ll be pleased to hear. The project leader, Captain Edward J.Ruppelt, was transferred to Denver and has since left the Air Force in disgust. However, he’s now working for the Northrop Corporation and is rumoured to be planning a book that will substantiate the reality of the UFOs, though siding with the extraterrestrial hypothesis.’
‘I’m not keen on the idea of a UFO book written by someone with that kind of credibility. Keep your eyes on him.’
‘I will.’
‘And the others?’
‘All of the staff, except for the original two officers, have been scattered far and wide, which others obviously view as a form of official punishment, or warning. As for the two remaining officers - captains Dwight Randall and Robert Jackson –we’re keeping the pressure on them all the time and consistently denying them promotion. In fact, by deliberately putting Ruppelt in charge of the former Project Blue Book, instead of Randall, who rightfully should have had the job, we were clearly slighting Randall. By putting him back in charge of the project only when it’s been decimated and

rendered virtually inoperative, the slight seems even more brutal. To Randall, as well as to those who know of his involvement with Project Blue Book, it must seem that UFO work is the kiss of death. I believe this is already having bad psychological repercussions on Randall. With him as an example, not too many others will be keen to investigate UFOs.'
'He still might need something, another little push, to tip him over the edge. I'll keep him in mind.'
'Yeah, you do that. Anything else?'
'No. Not for now.' Wilson stood up to leave. After studying the cosmic murals on the walls of the bar, he said, 'America is a nation of children - a gigantic nursery. There's nothing worth having here.'
'Rather here than the Antarctic,' Fuller responded. 'What kind of life can you have there?'
'A life of work,' Wilson said. 'And work is the true function of man - the use of the mind. All else is a waste of time.'
'You're not a real human being, Wilson.'
'Nor do I want to be. Now take heed of my warning, Mr Fuller. Tell your superiors not to try upstaging me.'
'I'll pass the message on,' Fuller said.
When Wilson left the bar, Fuller ordered another whisky. He took his time drinking it, distractedly studying the crescents, spheres and orbital paths on the walls, thinking of the great dream of space and Wilson's part in it. Fuller was no romantic - he had the instincts of a killer - but even he possessed certain human needs that could not be denied. Wilson was something else: a kind of mutant, without emotion, a creature driven by the dictates of the mind, unhampered by feelings. Even Hitler had been driven by resentment and hatred - recognisable human traits - but Wilson existed outside such emotions, which made him inhuman. Fuller, who was frightened by very little, was frightened by that thought.
He finished his drink, left the bar, and went to look for a whorehouse.
Even whores had feelings.

Chapter Twenty-Two

When Dwight entered the lobby of the airport at Albuquerque, New Mexico, after a commercial flight from Dayton, Ohio, he had been drinking again and was feeling a little drunk, but he knew that it would soon pass away, letting his depression and fear return. He didn't relish that much.

His old friend, Captain Andrew Boyle, was waiting for him in an air force uniform too tight for his expanding beer belly, but he seemed as energetic as ever, with a broad grin creasing his good-natured, sun-reddened face. Slapping his hand on Dwight's shoulder, he said, 'Hi, there, partner! Long time, no see. You look like you've lost a bit of weight and could do with some sunshine, but otherwise you're recognizably yourself. Hell, man, it's really good to see you. It's been too long, pal.'
'Yeah,' Dwight said. 'Too long.'

They embraced, shook hands, then walked to the car park, Dwight carrying his overnight bag in one hand, Andy dangling his car keys. 'Christ,' he said, 'how long's it been now? Eight, nine years?'

'Nine years, more or less, though it doesn't seem that long. Time moves like the wind these days. We're getting old too fast, Andy.'
'Yeah, and no better for it. Christ, those were the days, man! I still get a lump in my throat when I think of the old B-29s. We did a lot of crazy things in those days. You had to be young to do it.'
Dwight and Andy had flown in the B-29s over the Pacific during World War II, being shot at by the Japs and having more than one hair-raising escape. It all ended in 1945, when both were demobilised, and apart from a brief reunion when, a few years later, they served briefly with an Air Force Reserve Troop Carrier Wing, they had only managed to keep in touch through the mail and by phone, united by the kind of emotional bonds that could only be forged in war. They would both go to their graves, Dwight suspected, secretly relishing those dangerous years as the best of their lives. This was a shaming truth.
'Anyway,' Andy said, as they climbed into his well used 1947 Frazer Manhattan in the car park, 'this work you're doing must be almost as exciting - I mean, searching for UFOs.'
'It's not quite the same,' Dwight confessed. 'It's more like a bad dream. Quite frankly, it's pushing me to the limit and I'm thinking of getting out.'
'Out of the Air Force?'
'Right.'
'You were *born* for the Air Force,' Andy told him, turning on the ignition. 'You're a natural lifer.'
'I used to think so. Not now.'
'I don't believe this,' Andy said.
Leaving the airport, he took the road away from Albuquerque, heading into

the morning's brightening sunlight, past fenced-in hangars and a lot of warehouses and factories.

As a radar operative at Cannon AFB, Andy had regularly fed Dwight with information on UFO sightings. However, last night he had phoned with more urgency than usual to tell him that the previous evening he had personally witnessed the landing of a flying saucer in the restricted area of the base. That's why Dwight was here.

'I can't believe this business is driving you out of the Air Force,' Andy said, driving with the windows rolled down, letting cooling air rush in around them. 'You thrived on the dangers of the war, so what's happening now?'

'It's not the same as the war,' Dwight said. 'Not the same kind of danger. During the war, we were treated as heroes, doing what our country wanted, but chasing UFOs brings you nothing but flak.'

'What kind of flak?'

'Antagonistic interrogations. Lack of promotion. Postings to places like Alaska. Accusations of incompetence where clearly there was none. Midnight phone calls from irate superior officers. General harassment of every imaginable kind. Now there's talk of men in black paying visits to UFO witnesses, warning them off. UFO witnesses are also starting to disappear. Damm it, Andy, this isn't something you *see*. It's not a dogfight in clear sky.'

'How's Beth taking it?'

'Not much better than me. I'm drinking too much - I know it, but I can't stop - and Beth's frightened about the men in black, as well as about my drinking and my growing desire to get the hell out of it. It's been eighteen months since Captain Ruppelt's departure from Project Blue Book and, subsequently, the Air Force. Since then, the organisation's been reduced to a mere three members - Captain Bob Jackson, a secretary, and me. To make matters worse, our investigating authority has been passed over to the inexperienced 4602d Air Intelligence Service Squadron; and most of our projects have been strangled systematically through a deliberate reduction in funds.'

'Jesus Christ,' Andy muttered as the engineering and canning factories on the outskirts of Albuquerque gave way to sun-drenched, pastoral farmlands.

'Obviously,' Dwight continued, 'I've been badly shaken and disillusioned by what's happened. I'm also unable to comprehend why the Air Force is supposedly concerned with UFOs, yet at the same time is ruthlessly

discouraging a proper investigation of the phenomenon. Personally, I've been harassed constantly by my superior officers and passed over many times for promotion. Now I want to get the hell out - but ironically, given that she was the one who first suggested leaving the force, Beth says it's the drink talking and that there's nothing I could do as a civilian. She thinks I'm threatening our livelihood. She just wants me to transfer out of Blue Book, but I want to get out of the Air Force completely and she simply won't wear that. Frankly, Andy, I don't know *what* to do. I'm just running scared, I guess.'

'I don't blame you, old buddy, but are you sure you're not imagining a lot of this?'

'No, I'm not imagining it. Too many bad things have happened to those involved in UFO research. Also, I'm not imagining the harassment. Christ, Andy, even during that UFO invasion of Washington DC, I was hamstrung and practically ordered back to Dayton. As a matter of fact, I flew here on a commercial flight - at my own expense, Andy - because when I tried to charter an air force plane I was refused permission.'

'On what grounds?'

'They said the base was temporarily sealed off because a security exercise was taking place. A *routine* security exercise, they said.'

'This was yesterday?'

'Yes.'

'Then it was bullshit,' Andy said. 'There was no security exercise taking place at Cannon yesterday - and the base wasn't sealed off. Did you tell them why you wanted to come here?'

'No. I just announced myself as head of Project Blue Book. That was enough.'

'But you've visited the base before.'

'That's right. So the only reason they could've had for their lies was the landing you saw. Tell me about it.'

Andy glanced in his rear-view mirror, a reflex action denoting confusion, then he concentrated again on the road ahead. 'Weird,' he said. 'Kinda spooky. Problem is, I'd been drinking, a real bellyful of beer, and that made me keep my mouth shut about it - to everybody but you. It was about two in the morning. I was just returning to the base... What the hell! We'll soon be there, Dwight. Let's wait till we get there.'

They arrived at the sprawling Cannon Air Force Base a few minutes later.

After driving past the guardhouse and barrier at the entrance, Andy kept going along the fenced-in perimeter lining the road until he came to a place near the outer limits of the base, well away from the airstrip. He slowed down and stopped. Dwight could see the corrugated iron roof of a large hangar beyond the high fence. Andy pointed at it.

‘Right there,’ he said. ‘About two in the morning. I was driving right past there, coming in the other direction - pretty loaded, as I said - when I saw that the lights on that hangar were still on. As I was passing, I thought how unusual it was for it to be lit up at that time in the morning. I also noticed that there was a series of arc lights forming a circle in the cleared area directly in front of it. Then, inexplicably, the engine of my car cut out and I rolled to a halt. Cursing, not too sure of what was happening, thinking that the drink had made me do something stupid, I tried to start the car again, but it just wouldn’t spark. Then I heard a weird noise, a high-pitched whining sound, coming from the other side of the fence... and I looked up and saw that... that *thing* coming down.’

He shook his head from side to side, as if still not believing it, and looked at the hangar beyond the fence, reliving the night before.

‘A domed, disc-shaped aircraft. It was landing about fifty yards inside the fence, in that area illuminated by the circle of arc lights, directly facing the open doors of the hangar. The aircraft, or flying saucer, had no lights – that’s why the landing area was illuminated. The circular part around the dome of the aircraft was shaped like two plates, one placed upside-down on the other, and the raised dome in the middle was just like a pilot’s nose cabin, made of what seemed like Perspex, with a single pilot in it. The circular plates were revolving around the dome, which seemed to be gyroscopically balanced and, though fixed, was swaying up and down a little as the saucer descended. The closer it got to the ground, the slower the plates rotated and the quieter it became, until the high-pitched whining had become a low whirring sound. The saucer had balllike landing gear, which I saw being lowered in preparation for touchdown. It was practically hovering in the air, just above the level of the perimeter fence. Then it disappeared below the top of the fence and the sound of it cut out completely. When it did, my car’s engine started up again.’

Dwight was hearing all this clearly, but finding it hard to take in. He knew that Andy wasn’t lying, but it still seemed incredible.

‘Any insignia on the saucer?’

‘None,’ Andy said.
‘And the hangar doors were open?’
‘Yes. That hangar, I know, is used for secret aeronautical research projects, so I’m convinced that the saucer was being kept there. Certainly, it didn’t take off again. I drove my car off the road, cut its lights and ignition, and sat there for a good couple of hours, sobering up and hoping to see the flying saucer ascending.’ Andy shook his head from side to side, as if still finding it hard to accept what he had witnessed. ‘But it didn’t. At one point I thought I could hear muffled screeching sounds - like clamps or wheels needing oil - then, after a while, I heard the hangar doors closing. The arc lights above and in front of them were turned off. After that, there was silence.’
‘That’s a restricted area of the base?’
‘Sure is.’
‘So what do you think?’
‘What do *I* think?’ Andy unconsciously echoed Dwight’s words as he glanced up and down the sunlit road that ran past the base. ‘I’ll tell you. You believe in the extraterrestrial hypothesis, right? Well, let me remind you that most of the best saucer sightings have been over top-secret military installations - in other words, mostly right here in New Mexico. So on the assumption that the saucers aren’t piloted by extraterrestrials spying on our military secrets, what else could they be?’
‘Soviet secret weapons.’
‘Man-made?’
‘Right.’
‘But not necessarily Soviet. It’s highly unlikely that the Soviets could have managed to fly their spy planes over our top-secret military installations without being brought down by us. On the assumption, then, that the saucers are neither Soviet nor extraterrestrial, but are seen over our own top-secret establishments - and, as in this case, have even been seen to land – there’s a growing belief among some of us that they’re radical new US aircraft prototypes, developed by the Air Force or Navy.’
‘I can’t really accept this,’ Dwight said.
‘No? Then let’s see if we can get you into the base.’ Andy turned the car around and drove back to the main gate, stopping at the barrier. When he told the armed corporal in the gatehouse who Dwight was, the kid rang through for clearance, then put the phone down and shook his head, looking embarrassed.

‘Sorry, sir,’ he said, ‘but I can’t let you bring your guest in.’
‘Guest? He’s not a guest! He’s the decorated US Air Force captain in charge of Project Blue Book. Now let us in, damn it!’
‘Sorry,’ the corporal repeated, straightening up, ‘but I can’t do that, sir.’
‘Why not?’
‘Because I have my orders.’
‘What reasons were given?’
‘No reasons were given, sir. I was just informed by my superior officer that Captain Randall wasn’t to be allowed in.’
‘And who’s your superior officer?’
‘Major Shapiro, the base intelligence officer.’
‘Anyone else being denied permission to the base today, corporal?’
‘I can’t answer that, sir.’
‘Okay, corporal, thank you.’ Andy reversed away from the barrier, then took off in the direction they had come from, back to Albuquerque. ‘Do you get the picture now?’ he said. ‘The flying saucer I saw last night was certainly no Russian spy plane, since its landing had clearly been prepared for and it certainly spent at least last night in that offlimits hangar. Therefore, it was either an alien spacecraft landing with the full permission of the Air Force or a top-secret Air Force - or even Navy - aircraft. But since it didn’t look advanced enough to be an alien spacecraft, I’d opt for it being one of our own.’
‘Oh, boy!’ Dwight exclaimed softly. ‘That would certainly explain why certain members of intelligence don’t want us to find out too much.’
‘Right. The extraterrestrial hypothesis is a smokescreen. In reality, they’re defending their own secrets. Those saucers are man-made.’ He glanced at Dwight and grinned. ‘I’ve got some more news for you, but I’ll let you have it over a drink. I think you’ll need it, old buddy.’
They spent the rest of the drive in silence, allowing Dwight to think. He was having trouble putting his thoughts in order, but eventually he managed to do so. Now he saw, more clearly, the reason behind all the harassment, the smoke-screen of disinformation, the veiled threats from superior officers, the virtual destruction of Project Blue Book… the Air Force was protecting its own while pretending to be concerned with alien spacecraft.
Nevertheless, some nagging doubts remained, mostly to do with the extraordinary capabilities of the saucers reported. Dwight simply couldn’t imagine that the Air Force had made such technological advances, not even

in secret. Even for him, this was too much to deal with at the present time. It scared him to think of it.

In a roadside bar just outside Albuquerque, they settled into a dimly lit booth, both drinking large bourbons. When they were feeling more relaxed, Andy withdrew an air force folder from his briefcase, opened it, and squinted down through the gloom at the pages.

‘These classified Air Force intelligence documents were leaked to me by a friend. I can’t give you his name, but I can verify the authenticity of the documents.’ Grinning, he raised his finger like a schoolteacher. ‘Okay. Let’s try presenting a case for the possibility of man-made flying saucers.’ He dropped his raised finger onto the pages opened before him. ‘Though it’s not widely known, American intelligence has been interested in the possibility of man-made flying saucers for a long time. First indication of this is an old intelligence report - I have it right here in my file - stating that a patent for a so-called flying saucer with a circular fixed wing was taken out by an unnamed American citizen as early as March 22, 1932.’

‘*Unnamed*,’ Dwight emphasised, sighing with disappointment.

Andy smiled brightly, triumphantly. ‘That unnamed citizen was probably Jonathan E. Caldwell. This would explain why, on August 19, 1949, at the height of the immediate post-war UFO flap, the Air Force Command of Baltimore called a press conference to announce that two different types of prototypes that might solve the mystery of the flying saucers had been found in an abandoned farm near Glen Burnie, Maryland. According to the Air Force spokesman, both machines had been designed and constructed before the war by Jonathan E.Caldwell, with the aid of a local mechanic, and one of the machines had actually been flown.’

‘I have that on file as well,’ Dwight said.

Andy ignored his disappointment. ‘The machines had been abandoned for years and were falling apart, but as they were a combination of airplane and helicopter, with round wings and contrarotating propellers, it was the belief of Air Force intelligence that in flight they’d have resembled flying saucers. So they could have been the prototypes of the more advanced UFOs seen in the skies over the past few years.’

‘Sorry,’ Dwight said. ‘That notion was squashed less than twenty-four hours later when, at another urgent press conference, a different Air Force spokesman announced that the Caldwell machines had absolutely no connection with the reported phenomena of flying saucers.’

‘Correct. But what the Air Force spokesman *didn’t* state is that Caldwell’s plane was a craft with a circular wing of the parasol type, or one raised above the fuselage like an umbrella. It was constructed in 1932 and tested the following year by Professor J. Owen Evans in a wind-tunnel in Los Angeles, then flown by the well known pilot, Jimmy Doolittle, displaying a top speed of 97 mph and a landing speed of 23 mph. In 1936, Caldwell produced a modified version of the prototype, but it crashed, killing the pilot, thus putting Caldwell out of business for good.’

‘All very interesting,’ Dwight said, ‘but you’re talking about a pretty crude aircraft.’ ‘All early prototypes were pretty crude,’ Andy retorted. ‘Nevertheless, it’s clear from what I’ve picked up that US military intelligence continued to be anxious about the possibility of man-made flying saucers, particularly right after the war. They were, as you know, even more concerned because most of the saucer sightings in the US tended to cluster around key development stations such as atomic plants, guided missile areas, and your very own Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.’

Dwight grinned. ‘No argument there.’

Andy turned another page. ‘It’s also clear from remarks sprinkled liberally throughout these documents of the period that US intelligence findings seemed to *exclude* extraterrestrial origin of the saucers. This in turn made them increasingly concerned with the possibility that the saucers were man-made.’ He looked up, nodding emphatically. ‘More intriguingly, although on the one hand they were concerned with Soviet advances in this field, they soon began suspecting that the saucers might be of US or Canadian origin.’

‘You think that’s possible?’

‘Yeah. As the Navy, Army and Air Force are always, and were then, in constant competition with one another, each would have been reluctant to inform the other of any secret projects in the pipeline. So even at the White Sands Proving Ground, used extensively by the Navy for their aeronautical and missile experiments, there are research projects so secret that even the CIA can’t learn about them - and given Navy interest in vertical-ascending aircraft, these could have included saucer-shaped aircraft.’ Dwight finished off his bourbon and called for two more. ‘I can tell you have something else prepared. So go on. Lay it on me.’

Andy waited until the waiter had brought their drinks and departed.

‘As far as I can tell, the first rumblings about Canadian flying saucer projects were made in a classified CIA memorandum dated August 18 last year - a

year after the Spitzbergen flying saucer crash report. The CIA memorandum states: “According to recent reports from Toronto, a number of Canadian Air Force engineers are engaged in the construction of a ‘flying saucer’ to be used as a future weapon of war. The work of these engineers is being carried out in great secrecy at the A.V. Roe Company factories.” He looked up from his notes. ‘That report was correct - as were the widespread suspicions that the US Navy was conducting experiments on saucer-shaped, verticalrising aircraft in secret hangars in the White Sands Proving Ground.’

Dwight gave a low whistle. ‘That could make sense,’ he said. ‘One belief widespread in intelligence circles is that the formation of the lights in the famous Lubbock sightings, and others, weren’t indicative of small glowing saucers, but of the many exhaust jets along the edge of a massive, boomerang-shaped aircraft, or advanced flying wing, that would, when viewed from certain angles, strongly resemble a flying saucer, or saucers.’

‘Good,’ Andy said, then went back to his leaked documents. ‘Evidence for United States’s involvement with disc-shaped aircraft projects surfaced with information about the US Navy’s Flying Flapjack, or Flying Pancake. Designed by Charles H. Zimmerman of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics and constructed in 1942 by the Chance-Vought Corporation, the Flying Flapjack, or V-173, was an experimental, vertical-rising, disc-shaped aircraft, a combination of helicopter and jet plane, powered by two 80hp engines and driven by twin propellers, with two fins, or stabilisers, on either side of its semi-circular, or pan-cake-shaped, configuration. Reportedly it had a maximum speed of 400 to 500 miles per hour, could rise almost vertically, and could hover at thirty-five miles an hour. A later, more advanced model, the XF-5-U-1, utilised two Pratt and Whitney R-2000-7 engines of 1,600hp each and was reported to be about 105 feet in diameter and have jet nozzles - which strongly resembled the glowing windows seen on so many UFOs - arranged around its outer rim, just below the centre of gravity. It was built in three layers, the central layer being slightly larger than the other two. Since the saucer’s velocity and manoeuvring abilities were controlled by the power and tilt of the variable-direction jet nozzles, there were no ailerons, rudders or other protruding surfaces. The material used was a metal alloy that had a dull, whitish colour.’

‘In short,’ Dwight said, ‘a machine remarkably similar in appearance to those reported by so many UFO witnesses.’

‘Exactly,’ Andy said. ‘Now do you remember the April 1950 edition of the

US News and World Report?’
‘Christ, now that I think of it, I do,’ Dwight replied, feeling more excited every minute. ‘Information about the Flying Flapjack was released to the public in that edition of the magazine!’
‘Correct again, Dwight, and it touched off some interesting speculations. The first of these arose from the retrospective knowledge that the Navy had always expressed more interest in a vertical-rising airplane than the Air Force and had, up to 1950, spent *twice* as much money as the Air Force on secret guided missile research. Also, their top-secret missile-research bases were located in the White Sands Proving Ground, where the majority of military UFO sightings had occurred. Also, because they weren’t involved officially in UFO investigations, they could conduct their own research in a secrecy unruffled by the attentions of the media and the public.’
‘Right,’ Dwight said, now genuinely excited. ‘And according to the Project Grudge report for 1947, the UFOs viewed over Muroc AFB on July seven and eight of that year were oscillating objects that flew at remarkably low speed and had tactics unlike an ordinary airplane. Some witnesses, all trained Air Force personnel, observed two discs at an altitude of about 8,000 feet, both manoeuvring in tight circles with varying speeds - and oscillating. Also, just like the XF-5-U-1, both discs had two fins on the upper surface.’
‘Go on,’ Andy said, grinning with pleasure at what he had started.
‘Well, another interesting point is that the measurements taken by Navy commander R.B. McLaughlin and his team of Navy scientists of the UFO they’d tracked over the White Sands Proving Ground in 1949, two years after the Muroc sightings, corresponded closely, except for the speed, with the details of the original XF-5-U-1. It’s also worth noting that initial reports of the extraordinarily high speeds recorded by McLaughlin turned out to be inaccurate and that later analysis of the data brought the speed much closer to that of an advanced jet-plane... or to the original expectations for the Flapjack.’
Nodding affirmatively, Andy, now as excited as Dwight, said, ‘And the *US News and World Report* also pointed out that the Air Force had called off official inquiry into the UFO phenomenon the previous December, even in the face of overwhelming evidence that the saucers were real. This was seen by many as a clear indication that top Air Force officials actually *knew* what the saucers were and where they come from. Therefore, while still denying that the Air Force was involved, they were no longer concerned about the

saucers. The article concludes: “Surface indications, then, point to research centres of the US Navy's vast guided-missile project as the scene of present flyingsaucer development.”’
‘In other words, the White Sands Proving Ground and other secret locations right here in New Mexico.’
‘Ding, dong! First prize!’
‘So what happened to the Flying Flapjack?’
Andy glanced at his leaked documents. ‘The production prototype of the Flapjack was due for a test-flight at Muroc AFB in 1947 - when the first flying-saucer sightings over that same base and at Rogers Dry Lake, adjacent to Muroc, were recorded. Whether such test flights were actually carried out has never been confirmed or denied by the US Navy. The only official statements given were to the effect that work on the Flying Flapjack ceased the following year... - but US involvement with saucer-shaped aircraft didn’t end with that prototype.’
Andy had a sip of bourbon and lit a cigarette. After blowing a couple of smoke rings and watching them disappearing, he said, ‘At this point it’s worth reminding you of certain facts taken from your own Project Blue Book reports.’
‘Always reliable!’ Dwight quipped.
‘Of course,’ Andy responded, then turned serious again as he lowered his eyes to his notes. ‘In the reports that started the modern UFO scare - the Harold Dahl and Kenneth Arnold sightings of June 1947 - both men observed the UFOs in the vicinity of Mount Rainier, the Cascades, in the state of Washington - which divides Oregon and Canada - and both stated independently that the UFOs flew away in the direction of the Canadian border.’
‘That’s right - towards Canada.’
Andy nodded. ‘Shortly after, during the first week in July, there were numerous reports of unidentified, luminous bodies in the skies over the Province of Quebec, Oregon, and New England. The next major UFO flap was the so-called invasion of Washington DC in 1952; and while the official flap started on July 19, there was a record, dated June 17, of several hundred unidentified, red spheres that flew at supersonic speeds over the Canadian Air Base of North Bay in Ontario and then crossed over some of the southeastern states. Finally, nearly all of the subsequent Washington DC UFOs were reported as flying away in a northerly direction; and when they

returned, en masse, on July 26, their disappearance in a general northerly direction - towards the Canadian border - also applied.' He looked up from his notes. 'Given this, it's a matter of particular interest that on February 11 last year the Toronto *Star* reported that a new flying saucer was being developed at the AVRO-Canada plant in Malton, Ontario.' Dwight gave another low whistle, then said, 'Christ, how did I miss that?'

'Because your research teams were only looking for UFO reports - not reports about official, saucer-shaped, experimental aircraft.' Andy puffed another cloud of smoke and looked back at his Air Force folder. 'Of course the US and Canadian governments both denied involvement in any such projects, but on February 16, after freelance photographer Jack Judges had taken an aerial photograph of a flying saucer resting outdoors in the Avro-Canada plant in Malton, the Minister for Defence Production, C. D. Howe, admitted to the Canadian House of Commons that AVRO-Canada was working on a mock-up model of a flying saucer, capable of ascending vertically and flying at 1500 miles per hour. By February 27, Crawford Gordon Jr., the president of AVRO-Canada, was writing in the company's house journal, *Avro News*, that the prototype being built was so revolutionary it would make all other forms of supersonic aircraft obsolete. That aircraft was called the "Avrocar".'

'Shit,' Dwight muttered. '*Now* I remember it!'

'I bet you do.' Andy was amused, but instantly went back to his leaked documents. 'Soon the Toronto *Star* was claiming that Britain's Field Marshal Montgomery had become one of the few people to view Avro's mock-up of the flying saucer. A few days later, Air Vice Marshal D. M. Smith was reported to have said that what Field Marshal Montgomery had seen were the preliminary construction plans for a gyroscopic fighter whose gas turbine would revolve around the pilot, positioned at the centre of the disc. Confirmation that the craft actually existed came via last year's April issue of the *Royal Air Force Flying Review*, which contained a two-page report on the Avrocar - also dubbed the "Omega" - including some speculative sectional diagrams. According to this report, the building of a prototype hadn't yet commenced, but a wooden mock-up had been constructed behind a closely guarded experimental hangar in the company's Malton plant, near Ontario. The aircraft described had a near-circular shape, measuring approximately forty feet across, and was being designed to attain speeds of the order of 1,500 mph - more than twice that of the latest swept-wing

fighters. It would be capable of effecting 180-degree turns in flight without changing altitude.'
'Just like a real flying saucer.'
'Exactly,' Andy said. 'And last November, Canadian newspapers were reporting that a mock-up of the Avrocar, or Omega, had been shown on October 31 to a group of twenty-five American military officers and scientists. To date, nothing else has been reported by the press, but according to these leaked intelligence documents, the US Air Force, concerned at Soviet progress in aeronautics, has allocated an unspecified sum of money to the Canadian government for the building of a prototype of their flying saucer. The machine's been designed by the English aeronautical engineer, John Frost, who once worked for AVRO-Canada in Malton, Ontario, and it'll be capable of either hovering virtually motionless in mid-air or flying at a speed of nearly 2,000 miles an hour.'
Dwight gave another low whistle.
'Last but not least,' Andy continued, 'according to these documents, the government's hoping to form entire squadrons of AVRO-Canada's flying saucers for the defence of Alaska and the far regions of the North - because they require no runways, are capable of rising vertically, and are ideal for subarctic and polar regions.'
Realising that he had been conned all along by his superiors, who wished to protect their own flying-saucer projects, Dwight filled up with rage. With that came the urge for revenge against those who had wronged him.
'All we need is solid proof,' he said.
'I've got that as well,' Andy responded, grinning like a kid as he withdrew a brown envelope from his Air Force folder. 'When that thing landed last night, I took a photo of it. Naturally, I'm going to keep the negative, but the photo's for you. With my compliments, Dwight.'
Dwight took the photograph and examined it. His heart started racing when he saw the slightly unfocused photo of a flying saucer hovering just above the fence of Cannon AFB, gleaming in the light from the arc lamps forming a circle around it. His hand started shaking as he took in what he was seeing, but eventually, with his heart still racing too quickly, he slipped the photo back into the envelope and put it into his briefcase.
'Thanks a million,' he said. 'I don't know how to thank – '
'My pleasure,' Andy interjected. 'Now I've got to get home. Back to Cannon AFB, where you're no longer welcome. I'll keep my eyes and ears

peeled.’
‘Please do that,’ Dwight said.
They left the bar together, shook hands on the sidewalk, then walked off in opposite directions. Andy clambered into his car while Dwight caught a cab.
He checked into a motel located near the airport, went straight to his room with a halfpint of bourbon, drank some of it while endlessly studying that photo of the man-made flying saucer, then lay down and fell into a dream-haunted sleep.

Dwight was dreaming of flying saucers that glowed magically in the night and, though serenely beautiful, filled him with fear. That fear deepened as a dazzling silvery-white light filled his vision, gradually surrounded him, and then, in an inexplicable manner, pressed in upon him.

The light seemed almost physical.
At first he thought the light was part of his dream, filling up an alien sky, but then he opened his eyes and realised it was real enough: a brilliant, flickering light that was beaming in through the window of the motel room to dazzle him and, in its oddly physical way, tighten his skull and fill it with pain.
Even as he was rubbing the sleep from his eyes, trying to adjust to the unusual, blinding light and the increasing pain in his head, he heard a bass humming sound, almost an infrasound, and felt the bed vibrating beneath him.
Fully aware that this wasn’t normal and deeply frightened by it, he was trying to gather his senses together when the room door burst open and two men, both dressed in black coveralls, entered and rapidly approached the bed.
Dwight attempted to sit upright, but before he could do so, one of the men pressed something hard and metallic against the side of his neck. He felt an electric charge course through him, like being struck with a hammer, then he went numb from neck to toe.
Terrified, unable to move a muscle, he could only look on as one of the men picked the manila envelope off the bedside cabinet, tugged the UFO photo out, examined it briefly, then nodded at the second man. The latter leaned over the bed to stare at Dwight with cold, almost inhuman eyes.
‘Stop pursuing us,’ he said. ‘It will only bring you grief. Not only for you, but for your family. You’ve been warned. *Auf Weidersehen*.’
The two men left the room, closing the door behind them, leaving Dwight propped up on the bed, completely paralysed and terrified.

That strange light still filled the room, pulsating, flickering, and at times he thought it might be a line of lights forming the whole. Accompanying the lights was the infrasound
- something felt, rather than heard - and Dwight felt it pressing around him, relentlessly tightening his skull, almost making him black out with pain.
He remained conscious, however, tormented by what was happening. The sweat poured down his face, the visible results of his racing heart, and he felt the panic welling up inside him as he frantically tried to move.
Now his terror was absolute, engendered by the paralysis, and he had visions of the horror of Beth and Nichola should they find him like this. The panic ballooned into mindlessness, stripping his senses bare. He was just about to tip into madness when the pressure of the infrasound decreased and feeling returned to him.
First a tingling in his toes, then warmth in his fingers. He bent an elbow, then a knee, as the brilliant, flickering light outside the window appeared to rise slightly, deliberately, swaying slightly from side to side.
The pressure of the infrasound decreased and finally went away altogether.
Dwight bent and stretched his legs. He flexed his fingers and raised his arms.
The dazzling light outside ascended to the top of the window-frame, hovered there for a moment, flared up briefly and then suddenly blinked out.
Dwight knew then that it was actually a line of smaller lights blinking out one after the other, but at very great speed, giving the appearance of one great light popping out.
Darkness rushed back into the room and the sky reappeared outside.
Dwight took a deep breath. He was trembling like a leaf. Sweating profusely, with his heart still racing dangerously, he glanced at the bedside cabinet to confirm that the men in black had actually been here.
The UFO photo was gone.
The men in black had been real, too.
Still in a state of shock, Dwight slid out of bed, hurried across to the window, opened it and looked up at the sky.
There were lots of stars up there. Look too long and they seemed to move. Dwight looked a long time and thought he saw one moving - that big one, almost directly above
- but he couldn’t be sure. He kept scanning the sky, looking for something unusual, but saw only the glittering lights of that sea of stars in the infinite darkness.

Shivering, though still sweating, trying to still his racing heart, he walked back to the bed, picked up the bottle of bourbon and drank too much of it too quickly.

Now, with his nerve cracking, fearful for Beth and Nichola as well as for himself, he was determined to leave the air force for good and put all this behind him.

It was best to be silent.

PART TWO

Chapter Twenty-Three

'I think you all know why we're here,' President Eisenhower said. 'Yesterday, at Cape Canaveral, Florida, Project Vanguard's first rocket, which the American people had been led to expect would put up the first earth satellite in history, blew up on its launching pad. I want to know why.'

Richard Horner, assistant secretary of the Air Force for research and development, coughed nervously into his fist, glanced at the other men in the Oval Room in the White House, then said, 'We still haven't ascertained the exact cause of the explosion, but according to Mr Fuller, here, Wilson was responsible.'

Eisenhower was standing beside his vice-president, Richard Nixon, framed by the window overlooking the Rose Garden and hazed slightly in the incoming morning sunlight. Both men, Fuller knew, were fully aware of the political seesaw arrangement with Wilson. The 34th President of the United States stared directly at him.

'That's correct, Mr President.' Fuller was unfazed by Eisenhower's stern look, which struck him as being that of a bachelor schoolteacher, rather than that of the most powerful man in the country. While admiring Eisenhower as a West Point graduate, renowned World War II military commander, supreme commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, or NATO, and active anticommunist, Fuller viewed his support of desegregation and the Civil Rights Act as unhealthy manifestations of liberal soft thinking. Nor was he keen on Eisenhower's vicepresident, Richard Nixon, whose support for the sleazy Senator Joe McCarthy and his self-serving witch-hunts had gained even decent anti-Communists, such as Fuller, a bad name. 'Wilson phoned me an hour before countdown to say the explosion would occur and he's arranged it as a warning that we were making progress too quickly for his liking.'

‘Maybe he’s displeased with our plans for the creation of a National Aeronautics and Space Administration,’ said Major General Joe Kelly of the Air Force Legislative Liaison, or SAFLL.

‘He’s not,’ Fuller informed him. ‘That’s the first thing I thought of, but Wilson wasn’t concerned about NASA. He’s annoyed by what he described as our increasingly naked desperation to beat the Russians into space.’

‘So he arranged the explosion on Project Vanguard’s first rocket,’ Eisenhower said, displaying anger for the first time.

‘Yes, Mr President,’ Fuller said. ‘Of course, as soon as he’d phoned me, I passed the warning on to the launch team. A last-minute check on the rocket showed no faults at all, so it was decided that Wilson was bluffing and that the launching should continue. Then the rocket blew up – just as Wilson had said it would.’

‘So how did he manage it?’ asked Major General Arno H. Luehman, director of information services.

‘With some kind of explosive device,’ Fuller replied, shrugging.

‘We can all assume that, Mr Fuller,’ Nixon said disdainfully. ‘What we want to know is how he got it on board.’

‘It had to be one of our men,’ Richard Horner admitted. ‘But with so many working on the project – and nothing found in the debris that relates to any known explosive devices – we’re having great difficulty in finding out who it was or how it was done.’

‘But we do at least know that Wilson has one, or even more, of his men planted in our rocket research teams.’

‘It certainly looks that way, Mr President.’

‘Either he has some planted in our rocket research teams,’ Fuller corrected him, ‘or he used some kind of remote-controlled device. Whether one or the other, he proved his point... He’s way ahead of us and we’re still at his mercy.’

That statement led to a brief, uneasy silence and the rising anger of Vice-president Nixon. ‘It’s a public humiliation,’ he said. ‘Made even more obvious by the fact that it was the Russians, and not us, who inaugurated the space age with their recent launching of the first man-made satellite, *Sputnik 1*.’

‘That’s old news already,’ Fuller responded, enjoying needling Nixon. ‘Last month, they sent up that dog, Laika, which orbited Earth in a second Russian satellite, six times heavier than the first.’

‘Right,’ General Kelly said. ‘And that *Sputnik* is also equipped to measure cosmic rays and other conditions in space, a good one thousand miles above Earth.’
‘That damned dog,’ Major General Luehman said bitterly, ‘is being tested for its response to prolonged weightlessness, so it’s a precursor to future manned spaceflights.’
‘They beat us into space,’ Nixon said angrily, ‘and now this Wilson has deliberately emphasised our humiliation and set the space programme back again. I thought we had a deal with that man!’
‘We do,’ Fuller said, ‘but it’s a seesaw arrangement. We give him a little, he gives us a little back, but whenever he thinks we’ve stepped out of line, he also gives us a warning.’
‘Like the explosion on our Project Vanguard rocket,’ Eisenhower said.
‘Right, Mr President. We’re only allowed to advance *behind* his technology. If he thinks we’re coming close to catching up with him, he pulls these little stunts – and he’s very good at it.’
‘So we’ve learnt to our cost – as have others. I believe he was also responsible for the crash of the British Airways Viscount in March this year, for the fire in the Windscale atomic works in Cumberland in October – ’
‘The Windscale piles are used to make plutonium for military purposes,’ Richard Horner interjected.
‘Exactly,’ Eisenhower said. ‘He’s also suspected of being responsible for the death of that Royal Navy Commander, Lionel Crabb, found headless in the sea near Chichester Harbour, England, in June this year. That was shortly after Crabb was accused of engaging in espionage activities against the Russians. There are even reports that he might have been responsible for exposing the spying activities of Burgess and McLean in 1955, in order to sour East-West relationships.’
‘He doesn’t like it when we talk to one another,’ Fuller explained. ‘He prefers us to be in conflict. We’re convinced that this deal he has with us he also has with the British and the Russians. He’s one real smart cookie. As for causing a little accident each time we advance too quickly for his liking – I believe the Brits and Russians have also had disasters caused by him – we’ll just have to be more careful about what we’re doing in our research establishments, particularly those in the White Sands Proving Ground.’
‘You mean our own flying saucers,’ Nixon said.
‘Correct. However, it’s even more important that we continue to keep hidden

the fact that the flying saucers most often seen, and also known to abduct people and animals, are in fact man-made by a highly advanced foreign power – which Wilson can now rightfully be called. If the public finds out about Wilson's flying saucers and Antarctic colony, we'll have mass hysteria to contend with.'

'I agree,' Richard Horner said. 'We must continue, as a means of disinformation, to encourage a widespread belief in the possibility of extraterrestrials. It's vital that we prevent the general public from learning that we're being threatened by a totalitarian regime using mind-control, laser-beam technology, and other highly advanced weapons and forms of parapsychological warfare. That knowledge would be more terrifying than the revelation that the saucers have an extraterrestrial source. Distance lends enchantment. The reality of the Antarctic colony could give the populace nightmares.'

'Unfortunately,' said Major General Luehman, director of information services, 'stopping speculations about UFOs won't be easy, as there have been more reports this year than any other.'

Fuller knew what he meant. In 1956, the ATIC had recorded 670 sightings, but this year, 1957, that figure had risen to over 1,000, with a gradual increase throughout the year, reaching a peak of over 500 for November alone. Remarkably, in this second week of December, those figures were continuing to climb, making this the biggest year for UFO sightings since 1952.

The sightings, Fuller knew, were due to a combination of Wilson's saucers, secret Air Force and Navy saucers, and wishful thinking, or mass hysteria, caused by the launching of the second Russian *Sputnik*. Nevertheless, their crucial factor was that Wilson was now flying more saucers than ever and doing it with impunity. In fact, Wilson controlled the skies.

'UFO speculation won't be lessened,' Major Kelly said, 'by the forthcoming Congressional hearings, brought about by relentless pressure from that former Air Force major, Donald Keyhoe, and his civilian UFO group, the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena. The problem of handling the hearings and answering Congressional enquiries about the UFO programme has fallen to us at SAFLL. So far, by using *Special Reader Report Number 14* for our information, we've been able to insist that there's a total lack of evidence for anything unusual in the skies. However, I don't know how long we can support that claim if we're forced into open hearings

on the matter.'
'Congressional hearings on flying saucers!' Richard Nixon exclaimed, aghast. 'I can't believe what I'm hearing!'
Turning to his assistant secretary of the Air Force for research and development, Eisenhower asked, 'Can you help?'
Horner nodded emphatically. 'I've already told subcommittee chairman Donald O'Donnell that hearings aren't in the best interests of the Air Force. He's trying to get the subcommittee to drop the issue, but it's early days yet. Meanwhile, I'll keep stonewalling Keyhoe and the NICAP.'
'Anyway,' Major Kelly said, 'if we *are* forced into Congressional hearings, we'll simply use the subcommittee as another tool of disinformation.'
'Very good,' Nixon said, flicking beads of sweat from his upper lip and looking as shifty as always.
'Meanwhile,' said Major General Luehman, 'my department is continuing the education of the public with the use of psychologists specialising in mass psychology. We're also using military training film companies, commercial film and TV productions, such as Walt Disney Productions, and popular radio and TV personalities, including Arthur Godfrey, to put over whatever we deem fitting. We're also continuing to disseminate negative literature about the civilian UFO organisations, including Keyhoe's NICAP and Dr Frederick Epstein's Aerial Phenomena Investigations Institute, based right here in Washington DC. Last but by no means least, we legally harass them on the slightest pretext. Similar treatment is being meted out to Air Force pilots and commercial airline pilots reporting UFO sightings.'
'Terrific!' That was Nixon.
'It all seems so sordid,' Eisenhower said, looking uneasy.
'But necessary,' Fuller insisted, amused when Nixon smiled encouragingly at him. 'We have to gradually kill off public talk about UFOs and trust that it then becomes a forgotten subject.'
'What about Project Blue Book?' Nixon asked. 'That damned project has done more to stimulate interest in UFOs than any other branch of the services.'
'It's now well under control,' Fuller said. 'Blue Book's been run down and is now under the supervision of the 1006th Intelligence Service Squadron, which knows practically nothing about UFO investigations. As for the vastly more experienced Captains Ruppelt and Randall, both have been pressured into leaving the Air Force for good, ensuring that the UFO projects, our own

and Wilson's, won't be discovered by either of them, accidentally or otherwise.'

'Let's hope they're not discovered by someone else,' President Eisenhower said. 'Gentlemen, thank you.'

Fuller was first to leave the Oval Room, pleased by what he had heard there. You simply couldn't trust anyone.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Dwight was drunk again. He was in that state a lot these days, but it was always even worse at Christmas, which reminded him of the family that he'd lost after leaving the Air Force. Now, sitting at the dining table in his untidy clapboard house, by the window overlooking the rusty pumps of the gas station located on a desolate stretch of road just outside Dayton, Ohio, he was listening to the Christmas carols being sung on the radio, sipping from a dangerously large glass of bourbon, and staring out at the dark, dust-covered road.

He was really surprised when a battered Ford pulled up and Beth stepped out. 'Oh, Christ!' he whispered involuntarily, talking to himself, caught between pleasure and embarrassment that she should find him like this. Sipping more bourbon, trying to calm his agitation, he studied her as she closed the door of the car, smoothed down her hair, then glanced nervously across the yard at the house.

Dwight slipped a little sideways, to ensure that she couldn't see him, then watched her advancing up the path to the front door. Wearing a tightly belted overcoat and high heels, she looked as trim and attractive as always. When she reached the front door, vanishing from his view, a lump came to his throat. Then the doorbell rang.

Twitching as if whipped, Dwight was about to hide his bottle of bourbon, but realising instantly that he would not get through this meeting without a drink, he just shrugged, had another sip, then went to the door, carrying his still half-full glass. He took a deep breath, opened the door, and looked straight into his wife's girlish, solemn face. She seemed as embarrassed as he felt, but she gave him a nervous smile.

'Well, well,' Dwight said, 'what a surprise! Long time, no see.'

'Yes, Dwight, a long time.' The winter wind was howling across her, beating at her, making her seem touchingly fragile against the nocturnal sky. 'Are you going to keep me standing out here all night or can I come in?'

'Oh, sure, Beth, I'm sorry.' He stepped aside to let her enter. When she

brushed past him, the brief touch of her body sent a shock coursing through him. He closed the door and followed her into the living room. She was studying the awful untidiness, which embarrassed him even more. ‘I guess I’m not too good at housekeeping,’ he said. ‘And the gas station keeps me pretty busy.’

Beth stared at the glass in his hand. ‘That as well, so I’ve heard.’

‘Yeah,’ Dwight said, ‘that as well.’ He defiantly finished off his drink, then topped up the glass. ‘You want one?’

‘Why not? Just a small one. Let’s share a Christmas drink together. Can I sit in this chair?’

‘Sure, Beth. Anywhere.’

He poured her a drink as she unbuttoned her overcoat, letting it hang open, then took the easy chair near the fire. She was wearing a white sheath dress that showed off her fine figure, and when she crossed her long, shapely legs, Dwight wanted to stroke them. Instead, he handed her the drink and took the chair facing her. They raised their glasses in a toast, drank some bourbon, then gazed at one another in silence.

‘Who told you I was drinking?’ Dwight asked eventually, wanting to get the subject over and done with.

Beth shrugged. ‘It’s all over town. At least among our mutual friends. You’ve been seen and heard, Dwight.’

He grinned, though he didn’t feel good. ‘Yeah, I reckon I have. It’s surprising how these things get a hold. I’m not cut out for a bachelor’s life.’

‘It’s been three years, Dwight. I hear you don’t even have a girlfriend.’

‘We didn’t separate because of that, Beth. I don’t need a girlfriend.’

‘Just the bottle.’

‘That’s right, Beth. You’ve got it. It deadens all needs.’

‘And all fears, as well.’

‘Those, too, I guess.’

He soothed those fears now by having another sip of bourbon, then he held the glass unsteadily in his lap and studied his wife. He had seen her only occasionally since their separation, usually when visiting Nichola, but it seemed like he hadn’t seen her for years, and her presence consumed him.

‘You should never have left the Air Force,’ she said. ‘You *needed* the Air Force.’

‘Obviously, the Air Force didn’t need me,’ Dwight responded, unable to conceal his bitterness. ‘You refused to accept it, Beth, but I *had* to get out.

They pressured me until I had no choice. That's how they stick it to all of us.'

He meant the officers investigating UFOs. First, Flight Officer Harris of the Roswell Army Air Base, then Captain Ruppelt of the ATIC, then himself. All had been forced to leave the Air Force after receiving too much pressure from above, usually in the form of blocked UFO investigations, unwarranted criticism, midnight interrogations by intelligence officers, unwelcome transfers to bleak spots like Alaska, and even visits from the mysterious 'men in black'. In the end, you simply couldn't take it any more and just wanted out.

'Yes,' Beth said, 'I have to admit that's true. Did you hear about Captain Ruppelt?'

'Yep. After leaving the Air Force, he wrote a book, *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*, claiming that the UFOs were real, solid objects. I read it. It was good.'

Beth nodded. 'But have you heard the latest? Ruppelt's done an abrupt about-face. Later this year he's bringing out a new edition of his book, recanting on his former beliefs and insisting that the UFOs aren't real at all.'

'I've heard that,' Dwight said. 'I've also heard that he's not in good health. That isn't uncommon either. Just look at me, Beth!'

She ignored the sour joke, instead glancing around the untidy room. Her look of distaste reminded Dwight of his past three years as a bachelor, mostly spent in a fog of alcohol, filled with too many fears and nightmares. It was the drinking, he knew, that had led to the separation. In resigning his commission and leaving the Air Force, he had only given impetus to the break that had clearly been coming. It was hard to recall it clearly now, but he *did* remember the fear. It was the fear that had led to his drinking, as well as his nightmares. He had once loved the Air Force, lived for it, was proud of it, but when he became involved with Project Blue Book, the Air Force had turned against him, blocking him, chastising him, eventually humiliating him, until his life became a living nightmare from which there was no escape.

All of that had come to a head shortly after his visit to Cannon AFB, when he'd had his terrifying experience with the men in black in that motel room outside Albuquerque, New Mexico. That event, more than anything else, had set the seal on his constant dread.

He had started dreaming about flying saucers, alien entities, men in black,

and eventually, as his friends in the ATIC were attacked one after the other – transferred, demoted, charged with spurious offences, haunted by anonymous phone calls – he had become increasingly isolated and then started cracking up. The heavy drinking soon started, leading to many fights with Beth, and when he told her he was resigning his commission, that was the last straw. They hadn't actually divorced, but merely separated, with Beth taking an apartment close to her parents in Dayton, moving in with a deeply upset Nichola. Shortly after that move, Dwight left the Air Force, took this job as a gas station attendant, which included the use of this broken-down house, and embarked on the worst three years of his life, trying to deaden his fear and shame with regular drinking. It pained him just to recall it.

'Anyway,' he said, 'I don't think you came here, after all this time, just to tell me about Captain Ruppelt.'

'No, Dwight, I didn't.'

'So what is it? Sounds like something serious. You think it's time for a divorce, is that it?'

'Why, would you give me one?'

'I wouldn't want to, if that's what you mean.'

'Why not? Because you still love me?'

'As a matter of fact, Beth, that's exactly it. That's the pitiful truth of the matter. Maybe that's why I'm drinking. I can't get you out of my mind, no matter how hard I try. And believe me, I've tried hard. As for Nichola, not having her around is a night-and-day torment. God, I miss her. I really do.'

Beth blushed, lowered her head, sipped some of her drink, and then looked up again.

'I still love you, too, Dwight. I really do. It's because I loved you so much that I couldn't bear to watch you destroying yourself. That's why we separated, Dwight. There was no other reason.'

'I know that. But it's been three years, Beth. So why are you here?'

'Because I still love you. Because Nichola loves you. Because I miss you, but Nichola misses you even more and needs you as well. Every year, for the past three years, she's begged me to bring you back for Christmas. I refused her the first two years; I couldn't refuse her a third time. Also, I think it's time, Dwight. I think you should at least spend Christmas with us and see what it's like. For me. For Nichola. Most of all, for yourself. Just Christmas to start with, that's all. What do you say?'

Dwight's instinct was to refuse because, in truth, he felt scared. He was frightened of being with them, of resurrecting buried feelings, but the very thought of being home released those emotions and brought a lump to his throat. He was also moved by Beth's presence, still loving her, wanting her, and though feeling awkward with her, embarrassed by his condition, he was moved by a desperate yearning to get back what he had lost.

'My pleasure,' he said.

During the drive to Beth's apartment near Carillon Park in Dayton, Dwight was increasingly nervous, but the instant Nichola threw herself into his arms, his problems were over. Now twelve years old, with an oval face and long dark hair, Nichola shared her mother's natural grace and beauty. After a light supper and long talk with his daughter – during which he lied blatantly about the joys of his job at the gas station and then discussed Nichola's progress at school – Dwight retired to the bed in the spare room. There, for the first time in months, he had a sleep undisturbed by dreadful nightmares.

The next morning, Christmas Day, they were joined by Beth's parents, Joe and Glenda McGinnis, whose customary good humour removed the last of Dwight's discomfort at being back temporarily with his wife and child. Thoughtful as always, Beth had made Dwight sign the labels on some of the presents she had bought for Nichola, and when Dwight saw the delight on his daughter's face, he was deeply moved. Later, when he received his own presents, some from Beth, some from Nichola, he had to turn away in order to hide his brimming tears; though he practically broke down when Beth kissed him lightly, tentatively, on the lips.

'God, Beth!' was all he could murmur, trying to catch his breath.

They shared a fine Christmas dinner, drank far too much, revived themselves with an afternoon walk through the park, then passed the rest of the afternoon in front of the TV set, which showed snow in many parts of the country while Bing Crosby, appropriately, sang 'White Christmas'. By the early evening, after Beth's parents had left, Dwight was in a mellow mood, perhaps dangerously sentimental, and had to wipe tears from his eyes a second time when he tucked Nichola into her bed and returned to the living-room.

'God, I miss her,' he said.

'And me, too, I hope,' Beth retorted. She was stretched out on the sofa, wearing slacks and a loose sweater, holding a glass of white wine in one

hand, her gaze fixed on the TV.
‘Yeah, right,’ Dwight said, ‘you, too.’
He wanted to fall to his knees beside her, to thank her for bringing him home, even if just for Christmas, thus reminding him of what he had lost by giving in to his fears.
‘Beth…’ he began, about to pour out his heart... Then the front doorbell rang.
Beth glanced up, blushing guiltily, then swung her legs off the sofa and hurried past him, letting her hand slide over his shoulder, as if in encouragement.
‘I have a surprise visitor,’ she said. ‘I just hope you’ll be pleased.’
Though initially frustrated at the thought of this unexpected intrusion, Dwight was at first startled, then delighted, when Beth led former USAF Captain Bob Jackson into the living-room. Dwight hadn’t seen his old friend for three years, but Bob looked pretty much the same: still sleek-faced and sassy, if a little thicker around the waist. Wearing a plain grey suit with white shirt and tie, he was grinning from ear to ear and looking a lot healthier than the man who had been posted to Alaska just after Dwight had left the Air Force. He embraced Dwight, then vigorously shook his hand.
‘Hell, man,’ he said, ‘it’s good to see you. It’s been too long, buddy.’
Stepping away from each other, they both grinned in a kind of dumb disbelief, until Beth said, ‘Okay, you two, sit down and I’ll get you a drink.’
‘I’ve been drinking all day,’ Bob said, ‘so a beer will do fine. Christmas Day, don’t you know?’ He grinned at Dwight as he took a soft chair near the fire. ‘Had a good Christmas yourself, did you, Dwight?’
‘Terrific,’ Dwight replied, sitting on the sofa facing his old friend. 'My first Christmas with my family in three years.’
‘Yeah, I heard. I only got back from Washington DC yesterday and Beth told me when I called. She also said she was hoping to have you home for Christmas and told me to drop in. Said it might do you some good. Am I doing you good, Dwight?’
‘Feels just like old times, Bob.’ Beth handed Bob a beer, then joined Dwight on the sofa. He was still nursing a glass of white wine and letting it last. ‘So obviously you know what happened to me. What happened to you?’
Bob sighed. ‘Life at the ATIC was hell after you left. They kept transferring me here and there, from one lousy place to another. Promotion was refused. I was repeatedly charged for petty infractions, so in the end I just got the hell

out. Most of the others on Project Blue Book had similar experiences – just like you and Ruppelt.'
'When did you resign your commission?'
'Two years ago.'
'So what have you been up to since then?'
'Well, you know, Dwight, I just couldn't forget this UFO business. Couldn't get it out of my goddamned head. So after a couple of months just fooling around, including getting married to our former secretary, Thelma Wheeler – remember her?' he asked, briefly changing the subject.
'Hell, yes!' Dwight responded, instantly recalling the sexy blonde WAC corporal from Huntsville, Alabama, with whom Bob had had a lengthy flirtation.
'She was harassed as well,' Bob continued. 'Harassed until she couldn't take it any more and packed it in, like me. Anyway, when we were married, we decided to get out of Dayton entirely, so I took a job as technical advisor for an aeronautical engineering company located in Greenbelt, Maryland. In truth, I was kind of a salesman, using my Air Force background to sell the merits of the company to the many military establishments in that area. The job was okay – it got me out and about a lot – but I still couldn't shake off all those questions that Ruppelt had raised about the UFO phenomenon. They haunted me night and day. Finally, through one of my acquaintances, I was introduced to Dr Frederick Epstein, a former astronomer who'd become obsessed with UFOs and now heads the Aerial Phenomena Investigations Institute, a civilian UFO organisation located in Washington DC.'
'I know him,' Dwight said. 'I interviewed him way back in 1953, shortly after he'd formed the organisation.'
'That's right,' Bob said. 'He reminded me of that interview the first time we met. Anyway, I went to work as an investigator for the APII, initially on a part-time basis, then full time. And that's what I do now.'
Beginning to understand that there was more to this meeting than a casual Christmas visit, Dwight glanced at Beth. She merely offered a slightly teasing smile, sipped her drink, then said, 'Bob's come to Dayton to carry out some investigations on behalf of the APII. Until this evening, I hadn't seen him for three years either.'
'That's right,' Bob said. 'I'm here to investigate the growing claims that there's a storage facility in Wright-Patterson AFB for corpses found in crashed UFOs.'

‘There was no such room when *we* were there,’ Dwight said.
‘No, but the base has changed a lot since we left and the ATIC was virtually dissolved. There are lots of restricted areas in Wright-Patterson – more now than ever before – and one of them *could* contain a top-secret storage facility for crashed UFO parts, or even dead crew members.’
‘This whole business of alien corpses at Wright-Patterson is based on the notorious Aztec case of 1948,’ Dwight reminded him. ‘It all began with a book by one Frank Scully, a former Hollywood *Weekly Variety* columnist who alleged that a flying saucer crashed east of Aztec, New Mexico, in 1948, and was found virtually intact, with sixteen dead aliens, or UFOnauts, inside. According to Scully, the flying saucer was dismantled and the pieces, along with the remains of the sixteen aliens, were transported in secret to Muroc Dry Lake, now Edwards AFB, California, then on to a so-called top-secret Hangar 18 in Wright-Patterson. Scully also alleged that there’d been three other flying-saucer landings during the same period and that a total of thirty-four dead aliens had been found and were also being held at Wright-Patterson.’
‘But having been at Wright-Patterson at the time, you didn’t believe it.’
‘Right,’ Dwight said emphatically. ‘Precious little substantiation could be found for Scully’s claims. In fact, two years later, an investigative reporter, J. P. Cahn, revealed that Scully had received most of his dubious information from Silas Newton and a Dr Gee, later identified as Leo A. Gebauer. Both men were experienced confidence tricksters who’d been arrested that very year for trying to sell worthless war surplus equipment as oil detection devices. They probably based their whole story on the Roswell Incident of 1947, which we both know so well.’
Dwight certainly knew that case well and could still recall virtually every word of his conversations with Flight Intelligence Officer First Lieutenant William B. Harris, who had compiled the official report on the Socorro sighting. He also recalled that at the insistence of General Hoyt Vandenberg, then Deputy Chief of the Air Force, the three charred corpses and the debris from the Socorro crash had been picked up by an intelligence team from the 509th Bomb Group and transported under strict secrecy to an unknown destination, though rumour had it as Carswell AFB, Fort Worth, Texas.
‘If Scully based his Aztec landing on the Roswell Incident, at least he picked a damned good case,’ Bob insisted. ‘You and I both know that the crash at Roswell was a real one – just as real as some of the reported landings.’

‘What landings?’ Dwight asked, becoming interested despite himself.
‘One of our leading test pilots, Gordon Cooper, has claimed that while at the Edwards Air Force Base Flight Test Centre in California last year – the same place where Scully’s crashed flying saucer and its dead occupants were reportedly taken in 1948 – a team of photographers assigned by him to photograph the dry lakes near Edwards AFB spotted a strange-looking craft hovering just above the lake bed. Then the object descended slowly and sat on the lakebed for a few minutes. According to the photographers, it was at least the size of a vehicle that would carry normal people. They also insisted that it was a circular-shaped UFO that took off at a sharp angle and rapidly flew out of sight.’
‘Naturally they took photos.’
‘Yep.’
‘So what happened to their film?’
‘According to Cooper, it was forwarded to Washington DC for evaluation, but no report came back and the film never resurfaced.’
‘No film, no evidence – the same old story.’
Bob was unfazed by Dwight’s cynicism. ‘Dr Epstein has shown me the certified statements of two USAF pilots, confirming that UFO landings took place at Cannon AFB, New Mexico, on May 18, 1954, at Dewed Nike Base on September 29, 1957. He also has CIA-censored reports on another two UFO landings that took place at Holloman AFB. You might be convinced about Cannon AFB, since it was your own experience there, in 1954, that finally encouraged you to get out of the Air Force.’
Shocked to be reminded of that fearsome experience, Dwight glanced at Beth and was rewarded with an encouraging smile. Sipping the last of his wine, he recalled his visit to the road outside Cannon AFB, New Mexico, where his friend, Captain Andrew Boyle, had given him a good description of his personal sighting of the landing of a saucer-shaped craft outside a hangar in a restricted area of the base. After showing him the specific hangar, Boyle had given him a photograph of the UFO as proof.
Even more vivid and frightening than this recollection was the memory of how, when Dwight had been lying on his bed in the motel room, located on the outskirts of Albuquerque, a dazzling pulsating light had filled the room, a bass humming sound had almost split his head, and three men dressed in black coveralls had entered. One of them had temporarily paralysed Dwight with some kind of stun gun, another had whispered a warning in his ear, and

the third had stolen his invaluable UFO photograph. Shortly after the men in black left the room, the pulsating light and headsplitting noise went away and feeling returned to Dwight's body. What was not to go away was the fear that subsequently drove him to the bottle and out of the Air Force for good.

He felt that fear now.

'Okay,' he said, 'you've got me on that one. What about the other two?'

Grinning, Bob said, 'The first one took place shortly before 8.00am on an unspecified day in September, 1956, when a domed, disc-shaped UFO landed about fifty yards from US 70, about twelve miles west of the base. The ignition systems and radios of passing cars went dead and the peak-hour commuter traffic backed up as amazed witnesses – including two Air Force colonels, two sergeants, and dozens of civilian Holloman AFB employees – watched the UFO for over ten minutes, until it took off with a low whirring sound. Shortly after its disappearance, word of the sighting flew from Holloman to Washington DC and the area was soon inundated with Air Force intelligence officers and CIA agents. Base employees who'd witnessed the sighting were sworn to secrecy and the Pentagon's evaluation team wired a report stating that the UFO wasn't any type of aircraft under development by the US or any foreign terrestrial power.'

Bob sipped some beer, then took a deep breath and let it out again. He was clearly enjoying this.

'Then, just this summer, a mechanic at Holloman AFB was working on a grounded Lockheed F-104 jet interceptor when he saw a disc-shaped object hovering silently over the tarmac. After watching the object retracting its ball-like landing gear, he called another mechanic and both of them watched the UFO take off vertically at great speed. During a subsequent interrogation, both men identified the craft type they had seen from a book of over three hundred UFO photographs. They were then informed that personnel in the base control tower had observed the same object for two or three minutes. They were also warned not to discuss the sighting and made to sign a statement swearing them to secrecy.'

'Very persuasive,' Dwight said, impressed by Bob's enthusiasm and responding instinctively to it, feeling more alive than he had done for three years. 'But I still don't believe you'll find a Hangar 18 in Wright-Patterson AFB, let alone alien corpses or crashed UFO debris. What *did* you find there?'

Bob grinned like a Cheshire cat. ‘According to my informant, all requests to Wright-Patterson AFB for information regarding Hangar 18 are routinely given the reply that it doesn’t exist. But he insists that Wright-Patterson’s top-security Area B contains a building numbered 18-A. Indeed, he said he’s personally seen it, though he’s never been allowed in. It’s a building – not a hangar – with a tall wire fence around it. All of its windows have been knocked out and replaced with concrete.’ ‘Anything else?’

‘Yes. He was adamant that similar storage facilities would be found in the White Sands Proving Ground, Los Alamos, New Mexico, and Carswell AFB, Fort Worth, Texas.’

Dwight involuntarily sat upright when he heard the last named. ‘And we both know what was shipped to Carswell AFB, don’t we?’ he asked rhetorically.

Bob grinned. ‘Sure do,’ he said. ‘The corpses and debris from the Roswell crash of 1947. Your eyes are gleaming old buddy.’

Dwight realised that he had been set up, probably for his own good. Glancing sideways at Beth, he saw her widening smile as she reached out to hold his hand and squeeze it. ‘Bob called me,’ she confessed, ‘to find out what you were up to. When I told him – about you working in the gas station and drinking too much – he was as upset as me and insisted that we somehow get together to persuade you to help him in his work for the APII. I believe it’s what you need, Dwight, to get you off the drink and give you something better to do than pumping gas. Please think about it.’

Dwight thought about it, feeling frightened, but wanting to do it, soothed by the warmth of Beth’s fingers around his hand, revitalised by her presence.

‘You won’t have to move to Washington,’ Bob explained. ‘You can be our Ohio stringer. Naturally you’ll come and visit us occasionally, all expenses paid, but in general you’ll remain here in Dayton. You’ll be our eyes and ears here.’

‘I don’t get it,’ Dwight said. ‘As far as I recall, Dr Epstein believes the UFOs are of extraterrestrial origin.’

‘He’s pretty open-minded about it, but so far he hasn’t come up with any more rational explanation.’

‘You know what Andy Boyle told me during my visit to New Mexico,’ Dwight said. ‘He presented me with the possibility that the crashed or landing UFOs might have been man-made – known to, and protected by, our own military intelligence. Have you told Epstein that?’

‘No, I haven’t. I don’t think the time is right. It’s a possibility I’d like you to pursue, but on your own, not through the APII. If what Boyle says is true, it’d be too big – and possibly too dangerous – for the APII to deal with. We’ll have to keep the lid on that, Dwight, until we’re sure of our ground.’
‘So I investigate general UFO cases for the APII while surreptitiously gathering information on man-made UFOs.’
‘That’s it, exactly. We keep the lid on the latter cases. They’re between you and me, Dwight. In this regard, I’ve no guilt about using the facilities of the APII, since I’ll be helping them with what you uncover in other areas. I need you, Dwight, and you need this work. So what do you say?’
Beth squeezed his hand again. ‘Please do it, Dwight. It’ll help you to find your way back. Your home’s here, in this apartment, with Nichola and me, not in that damned gas station. Work with Bob, Dwight. *Come home*.’
‘Yes,’ Dwight said, already feeling renewed and excited. ‘Yes, damn it, I’ll do it!’
Grinning from ear to ear, Bob shook his hand again, even as Beth, her eyes brimming with tears, turned into his arms, where she had always belonged.
‘Welcome aboard,’ Bob said.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Rocking nervously in his rocking chair on the veranda of his log-house in the enlarged compound buried deep in the jungle near the Paraguay River, Ernst was feeling like an old man as he looked at the moonlit sky to observe the majestic descent of the biggest flying saucer he had seen so far. Though an awesome 350 feet wide, this transport craft was otherwise like the others: two immense, inverted plates that were rotating around the dome-shaped, gyroscopically stabilised central fuselage. Though not hindered by normal heat and drag, thus giving off no sonic booms or other noises, other than an almost physical infrasound, the saucer was creating violent currents of air that were making the grass and plants flutter wildly, noisily.

As usual, the native workers who lived in the shacks located around the inner edge of the compound were standing outside their modest homes, untouched by the precisely edged whirlpool of wind, looking up in awe and fear as the immense craft descended.

Also looking up, and clearly terrified, were the many captured Ache Indians being held like cattle in the big bamboo cages located near the shacks of the compound workers. These unfortunates, who had never seen an aeroplane, let alone such a gigantic flying saucer, started wailing and

shaking the bamboo bars of their cages, wanting to break free and run away. They only quietened down when threatened by Ernst's armed *Federales* and *contrabandistas*. Those who failed to respond to threats were hammered by rifle butts until either they shut up or collapsed, unconscious, to the ground.

Gradually the great flying saucer, still descending, covered most of the compound. Its central dome was as high as the craft was wide, about the height of a three-storey building. The whitish glow of its electrically-charged, minutely porous magnesium orthosilicate, which was ionising the air surrounding it, darkened to a more normal metallic hue as it hovered just above ground level, rocking slightly from side to side. Just before touching down, its thick hydraulic legs emerged from six points around the base to embed themselves deeply in the soft soil. The whole craft bounced gently on the legs, then settled down and was still. Its rotating wings gradually slowed and then stopped moving altogether, as did the wind that had been created by its electromagnetic gravity-damping system.

Still sitting in his rocking chair on the veranda, Ernst was deeply moved by the sight of the magnificent craft, though he also felt embittered at being condemned to this hellish jungle, rounding up Ache Indians instead of being involved in the great scientific achievements of the Antarctic colony. His feeling of loss was in no way eased by the knowledge that in truth he could never return to engineering, because it was now too far behind him and the technological advances of recent years had rendered his old engineering knowledge redundant. Trained as a military policeman by the SS, that's what he would now remain as: a hunter of men and prison warden for Wilson.

Ernst's bitterness was like acid in his stomach, almost making him retch. With the outer rings of the saucer no longer rotating, the infrasound faded away and a panel in the concave base dropped down on hinged arms to form a ramp leading to the ground. Armed guards wearing black coveralls emerged to form a protective ring around the ramp, then Wilson appeared, wearing his customary black shirt and pants, followed by some short, nightmarish creatures who had a jerky mechanical gait and were, Ernst assumed, the first of the promised cyborgs.

Surrounded by his own bodyguards of heavily armed *Federales* and *contrabandistas*, Ernst went to greet his master.

This time, when Wilson shook his hand, Ernst was no longer surprised at how youthful he appeared to be. Though nearing ninety, Wilson looked like a healthy sixty-year-old, with a good head of silvery-grey hair and smooth

skin on a handsome, though oddly inexpressive, face, dominated by unusually piercing, icy-blue eyes. Like his facial muscles, his movements were slightly stiff, reminding Ernst that he'd had numerous joint and organ replacements, as well as extensive plastic surgery.

This man, Ernst thought sourly, is a prototype of the creatures gathered around him. Steel-and-cobalt joints, artificial heart and grafted skin. He only *looks* normal.

Ernst shook Wilson's hand and murmured words of greeting while studying the nightmarish creatures spreading out behind him. He realised immediately that they were Ache Indians, which explained their short stature, but that now they were part man, part machine. Their hideous appearance was caused by the fact that their jawbones and mouths had been replaced with metal masks, they were also wearing metal skullcaps, and some of them were dressed in tight, one-piece, silvery-grey coveralls of a material resembling Thai silk.

They looked, Ernst thought, like extraterrestrials: creatures out of a bad dream.

'Your first cyborgs,' he said.

'Yes,' Wilson replied.

'Can they speak?'

'Not yet, but they function otherwise.'

'Are they still human in any sense that we'd recognise?'

'They still possess fragments of their former memories and reasoning, but their thoughts and actions, even their emotions, can be remote-controlled by the electrodes implanted in their heads through those stereotaxic skullcaps.'

'The metal caps.'

'Correct.' Wilson glanced approvingly at the nearest cyborg, then tapped his knuckles against the metal plate covering the unfortunate creature's lower jaw and mouth. 'Deprived of speech by the lower-jaw prosthetic,' he explained, 'they communicate via the stereotaxic skullcaps, which act like miniature radio receivers, operated by thought-waves. As an interesting side effect, their inability to speak is gradually producing in them what appears to be a primitive form of mental telepathy, which may soon make even skullcap communication redundant. This is an unexpected, novel development that we must follow through.'

Ernst nodded, intrigued despite his instinctive revulsion. 'And the metal hands?'

‘Myoelectric prosthetics, developed by our excellent Dr King, formerly of the Powered Limbs Unit of West Hendon Hospital, London, England. They’re really miniature versions of what we intend developing in larger form for the exploration of the seabed, the surface of the moon and, eventually, the planets: remote-controlled CAMS, or Cybernetic Anthropomorphous Machine Systems, of the kind presently being developed by NASA for space exploration. Naturally, we’re already well ahead of NASA – indeed, we give them our obsolete prosthetics and CAMS as part of our trade with the US – and we’ve installed larger versions of these remote-controlled, steel limbs as handling devices in this particular transport craft. Come, let’s have a drink on the veranda.’

‘But how can they stand being like that?’ Ernst asked, as he and Wilson turned towards the log-house. ‘They’re so inhuman. So... hideous.’

‘I told you. The stereotaxic skullcaps control even their emotions, so they’re programmed to forget everything that went before and to consider themselves perfectly normal. The skullcaps also direct the impulses from the brain to the severed limbs, thus controlling the movements of the myoelectric, prosthetic hands. As we direct those impulses via the stereotaxic skullcap, we can control everything they remember, desire, and fear, as well as their every physical action. I know they look like creatures from another world, but they’re highly effective as totally obedient slaves and ruthless bodyguards. In the latter context, their dreadful appearance is actually helpful, because it frightens the average human being to the point of paralysis.’

‘I was abducted by aliens,’ Ernst said, quoting from a host of recent articles about UFOs and their so-called extraterrestrial occupants.

‘Exactly,’ Wilson said with a rare, slight display of amusement. ‘It’s just what we need.’

They returned to the veranda and took high-backed chairs on opposite sides of a bamboo table containing a tall bottle of iced white wine and two glasses. A barefooted servant girl, Rosa, dark skin gleaming with beads of sweat, poured the wine, then stepped back into the shadows of the awning while Ernst and Wilson touched glasses.

‘*Skol*!’ Ernst said by way of a toast. After drinking, he wiped sweat from his forehead – how he loathed this constant heat! – then cast his gaze over the immense flying saucer, which practically filled the whole clearing and towered above him like a cathedral of pure, seamless steel. He then studied

the nightmarish creatures, the cyborgs, forming a protective cordon just below him, facing his armed *Federales* and *contrabandistas*. His native workers, he noticed, were also staring at the cyborgs, their eyes wide with fearful fascination.

'They're merely prototypes,' Wilson explained, noting Ernst's interest. 'Soon they'll be even more advanced. As far as these cyborgs go, what you see is what they are: restructured breathing and digestive systems, implanted skulls and myoelectric hands. They're fed intravenously, which gives us yet another hold over them. However, in later models, to be used for long-term undersea and space exploration, while the kidneys, lungs and original intestines will remain, they'll be strengthened and supported by a two-chamber pacemaker. Advanced prosthetic joint replacements have already been perfected – indeed, I have some myself – and will help defeat the rigours of the ocean bed and extended journeys through outer space. Soon, with our latest innovation – an electronic larynx – they'll be able to speak as well, though we'll reserve that privilege for the few, as we wish to encourage the evolution of mental telepathy in the speechless. As for the larger CAMS installed in this particular transport craft – watch!'

Wilson aimed a small, hand-held device at the front of the enormous saucer, then pressed a button. A bass humming sound emanated from the craft and the ramp leading from its base to the ground was pulled up automatically to form a sealed door. As soon as the door closed, another section of the base was lowered on hydraulic supports to form a much wider, brilliantly illuminated ramp between the interior of the saucer and the ground. Two smaller panels hidden in the otherwise seamless upper surface of the saucer then opened to emit beams of an even more dazzling light that converged on Ernst's jeep, parked close to the saucer's nearest edge. The beams of light flickered so rapidly, they hurt Ernst's eyes, but then, to his amazement, the parked jeep was pulled forward, as if the beams of lights were chains. When the jeep was about ten yards from the wide ramp, a CAM consisting of extendable arms and steel platform emerged from inside the saucer to pick up the vehicle and draw it up the ramp, into the saucer. When the jeep had vanished inside, the beams of light blinked out, the panels closed, and the ramp withdrew until the base of the saucer was sealed again.

'A form of magnetism created by powerful electrical forces in the laser beams drew the jeep towards the remote-controlled grips of the CAMS,' Wilson explained, 'allowing it to take hold of the vehicle and draw it up into

the saucer. When the uninitiated find this happening to their own cars, they assume it's some kind of miracle – or the highly advanced paraphysical activity of extraterrestrials. As with the appearance of the cyborgs, their terror makes them easier to handle if we wish to abduct them. Do you want your jeep back?'

'Yes, please,' Ernst replied, suitably impressed.

Wilson pressed a button on his remote-control and the previous process was reversed, with the base of the saucer dropping down to form a ramp and the CAM pushing the jeep out on its extending arms and steel platform, to deposit it back on the ground. Then the ramp was withdrawn back up into the saucer and again became a sealed door in the base.

'We've made even greater advances in our strobe-light and laser-beam technology,' Wilson said, speaking academically, without the slightest trace of pride in his voice – just doing his job. 'Now we're using wave-lengths and rhythmic patterns that temporarily freeze skeletal muscles or certain nerves, thus producing either paralysis or a trance-like condition. Observe!'

Some of the captured Ache Indians were still wailing in terror in the cages near the shacks of the compound workers. When Wilson activated his remote control, another small panel facing the cages opened in the sloping top-body of the saucer. A dazzling beam of light shot out, like a spotlight, and wandered across the clearing until it illuminated the cage from which most of the wailing was coming from. Once caught in the beam of light, the captured Indians became even more vocal in their panic, but when the beam of light started flickering on and off rapidly, like a strobe light, turning the clearing into a bizarre, slow-motion movie, the Indians caught in it not only fell silent but began collapsing and falling against each other, until eventually all of them were unconscious. When Wilson then turned off the flickering beam of light, the Indians regained consciousness, picking themselves up off the floor of the cage and glancing around them as if in a daze.

'As we learn more about the wave patterns of the brain,' Wilson explained, 'so we learn that most emotions – fear and anger, docility, even self-hatred – can be released by exposing the subject to the stimuli of strobe lights flickering in one of the four basic rhythmic patterns: alpha, beta, delta, and theta. In doing this, we can induce just about every kind of condition, from drowsiness, dizziness, mesmerism, or psychological paralysis, to epileptic or other violent seizures. Indeed, by combining strobe lights flickering in the

alpha-rhythm range, between eight and twelve cycles per second, with infrasounds, we can cause an epileptic seizure in the human subject
– as you can see. Recently we perfected this to the point where we can force a subject to turn against himself in the ultimate manner. Observe, Ernst.'
This time, when the beam of light shot out of the saucer and began flickering on and off at a blinding, disorientating rate, while making what was, to Ernst, a barely discernible, though oddly physical, sound, it picked out one of Ernst's compound workers. The man, wearing only a loin cloth and with a machete strapped to his waist, initially stepped back, dazzled, and started covering his eyes with one hand. However, before his hand reached his forehead, it started trembling violently, as did his whole body, then he screamed, clasped his head in his hands, and fell to his knees. Trembling even more violently, shaking his head from side to side as if in terrible pain, he collapsed to the ground, went into a fit, then managed to clamber back to his knees and remove the gleaming machete from his belt.
In the rapid flickering of the light, all his movements appeared to be in slow motion, as if in devilish pantomime – an illusion that rendered even more horrible what happened next.
Releasing another scream of anguish, the man shook his head violently again, then reversed the machete and rapidly slashed his own stomach open. Even as his entrails spilled out, he was hacking at himself again, repeatedly, dementedly, and kept doing so until he toppled sideways, to lie still in the flattened, blood-soaked grass.
Some friends, including a woman, possibly his wife, wailed in grief and fear, then bent down to examine the dead man as the flickering strobe light blinked out, returning the night to star-draped darkness.
Within seconds, Ernst's armed thugs were hammering the grieving people with the butts of their weapons, forcing them back, as another two *contrabandistas* picked up the dead man and carried him out of sight, to be buried, as Ernst knew, in the unmarked communal grave outside the compound. When the dead man's relatives and friends continued wailing in grief, Wilson again demonstrated the power of the strobe light by rendering them unconscious with it, after which they, too, were carried away.
Feeling nothing for the murdered man, Ernst was suitably impressed. Though increasingly resenting being kept in this hellhole, he still had a healthy respect for Wilson – and, indeed, practically worshipped him. He often despised himself for this reverence, but could not fight the feeling.

‘Finally,’ Wilson said, knowing exactly how to impress his disciple, ‘look at this.’

Again aiming his remote control at the immense transport craft, he activated the opening of panels located at half-a-dozen different points, equidistant around the top body, below the level of the mushroom-shaped central dome. With a speed that startled even the expectant Ernst, silvery objects shot out of the openings and ascended to a height of about a hundred feet, where they stopped abruptly and hovered in the air.

They looked just like the old World War II *Feuerballs*.

‘They are,’ Wilson confirmed, when Ernst had made this observation. ‘They’re highly advanced models based on the originals.’

‘How highly advanced?’

‘Though still only three to six feet in diameter, they have most of the capabilities of the larger saucers and are used for reconnaissance and as antiradar and sensing devices. As they can emit strobe lights and laser beams, they’re also used as mesmerising or stunning devices, as well as to draw mechanical vehicles close enough to the mother ship to be within reach of the CAMS.’

‘So they’re used in abductions.’

‘Correct,’ Wilson said. With what seemed like a sigh of regret (though Ernst suspected that such an emotion would be alien to him) he returned the advanced *Feuerballs* to the transport craft and closed the panels. He then reopened the wide ramp at the bottom of the saucer and ordered the cyborgs to herd the imprisoned Ache Indians up into it. The cyborgs turned away without a word and walked in their oddly mechanical manner to the cages where, with the help of stun guns that clearly stung, rather than inducing unconsciousness, they began marching the hurt, terrified Indians towards the saucer’s ramp.

‘The infrasounds,’ Wilson said, ‘are so condensed that they can create physical pressure on the human brain and the body’s organs, even bursting blood vessels in the head. Thus, they’re useful as weapons, which is why we’ve incorporated them into the saucers. As for the stereotaxic skullcaps, we also plan to use them to hypnotise or otherwise control human beings by remote control. We’ll abduct those we want, impregnate their heads with minute, remote-controlled electrodes, then return them to the world, to do our bidding as and when required. Eventually, in this way, we’ll be able to enslave the world’s most powerful men and women without resorting to war

and with few aware that they're under our control. In other words, they'll become our brain-implanted robots – even those in the highest seats of government.' He offered a smile that failed to warm the Antarctic blue of his eyes. 'So how are you, Ernst? I must say, you look well.'

It was a lie and Ernst knew it, though he was wise enough not to argue. He had aged overnight towards the end of World War II, when his wife and two children were killed in an air-raid on Berlin, making him realise that he had no one left but Wilson. At least he had aged in appearance – he had seen it in the mirror – though since coming to Paraguay he had aged in an even worse way: inside, in his spirit. Now his skin had a yellow pallor, his handsome features were wrinkled, and his body, though bone-thin, felt heavy and lifeless. As for his spirit, it was trickling out of him with each passing day, leaving nothing but the ghosts of old dreams that were long dead and buried. Ernst knew that he was paying for his sins and that hell was right here on Earth.

'I feel fine,' he lied, not yet having the courage to say otherwise. 'How are things in Antarctica?'

'Things run smoothly,' Wilson said. 'No problems so far. Our secret agreements with the Americans, British and Russians have ensured a constant supply of all the materials we require. As for general manpower and slave labour, we continue to replenish those lost through experimentation or natural causes by simply abducting more people and, of course, by supplementing them with your invaluable supply of Ache Indians. You're still having no trouble in obtaining them?'

'It's easier than it was. With General Stroessner now the President of Paraguay, we have total freedom of movement. The general always wants money.'

'Greed makes strong men weak, which is what we can utilise. The former war allies are greedy for our technology, which is why I can use them.'

'I sometimes worry,' Ernst said, 'that we'll give away too much.'

'You worry too much,' Wilson said.

'Do I? Please let me remind you that earlier this year Wernher von Braun's first satellite, *Explorer*, was launched successfully into space. Subsequent *Explorer* satellites made the first scientific discoveries of the space age by locating the radiation belt around Earth. In July, a US nuclear submarine, *Nautilus*, made a successful four-day journey under the ice of the North Pole. I should also point out that the past year has seen the discovery of

electronic miniaturisation in the shape of the silicon chip; and that the British and the Americans are both presently involved in Zeta programmes designed to harness the power of the H-bomb. This represents an unprecedented speed of advancement – and it's my belief that it was possible only through the West's access to our innovations, particularly those in the field of electronic miniaturisation, which will revolutionise every branch of technology.'

'I understand your concern,' Wilson said, 'but I think it's misplaced. We can only pass on what we've already surpassed, and each time they've tried to trick us, or planned to turn against us, we've easily scared them back into line with a display of our superior powers – as we did with the so-called UFO invasion of Washington DC in 1952 and when we arranged for the explosion in the US *Vanguard* rocket during its launch in December, 1957.'

'I'd *assumed* that was your doing,' Ernst said admiringly. 'How did you manage it?'

'We abducted one of the NASA engineers, flew him to the Antarctic base, implanted minute electrodes in his head, using a stereotaxic skullcap, then programmed him to forget his experience with us, while doing for us exactly what we wanted. He planted one of our explosive devices in the rocket – a device so minute, it leaves no traces after it's exploded. Naturally, the Americans never guessed who had done that – since they never thought to examine the heads of their engineers for electronic implants. So our brain-implanted slave is still there, at NASA, to do our bidding as and when required. The seesaw arrangement is working, Ernst, and we're in control of it. Now I have to be going.'

The abruptness was typical of Wilson. It was not a sign of rudeness, but of his impatience and inability to sit still and do nothing.

As Wilson pushed his chair back and stood upright, Ernst noticed that the last of the terrified Ache prisoners had been herded up into the transport craft by the stungun-toting cyborgs and that the saucer was therefore ready to depart. Swelling with a sudden, startling desperation, Ernst followed Wilson across the clearing, through his own armed *Federales* and *contrabandistas*, as well as Wilson's grim, black-clothed bodyguards, before stopping at the brilliantly lit, sloping ramp that led up into the saucer. Glancing up, Ernst caught a glimpse of gleaming white, curving inner walls, a stretch of steel-railed catwalk, figures silhouetted in dazzling light. He was gripped by the pain of loss when he thought of how all of this had begun: thirty years ago, when some primitive, liquid-fuelled rockets had been shot

up from an abandoned 300-acre arsenal in the depressing Berlin suburb of Reindickerdorf. Ernst had been there at the beginning, but not for too long. Each time he had been sidestepped, which had happened too often, he had lost another piece of his soul and hope for the future. Now he wanted that back, to recapture his lost youth, and so he turned to face Wilson, his idol, his master, fighting to keep control of his emotions and brimming self-pity.

'I lied to you,' he confessed. 'I'm not feeling fine at all. In fact, this place is driving me mad and I yearn to escape it. This jungle compound is a pestilence. These moronic natives are my despair. I have no-one to talk to, no-one educated, and now pressure from the West to find and punish former Nazis has made it too dangerous for me to even visit Asuncion, which I used to do regularly when I needed a break. I repeat, Herr Wilson, that I'm going mad in this place. Please take me back with you. Replace me with someone else. Give me a respite from this hellhole and let me do more important work. Let me work on the saucers.'

Wilson stared steadily at him, his blue gaze intense, revealing neither sympathy nor contempt, but merely the icy-bright gleam of pure pragmatism. When he then placed his hand on Ernst's shoulder, Ernst felt his heart sinking, knowing what the answer would be, not able to challenge it.

'I'm sorry, Ernst,' Wilson said, 'but the time isn't right. I understand your frustration, but I have to be hard with you, to keep you doing what you must do until this job is completed. Your time will soon come, Ernst. Soon you won't be needed here. In the meantime, however, you just have to be patient and continue to do the best that you can. You have to stay here, Ernst.'

'But I'm going mad here!' Ernst blurted out, ashamed of the self-pity in his voice, but unable to hide it. 'There's no one for me here. I can't go to Asuncion. If I can't get away now and then, I'll truly go crazy.'

Wilson squeezed his shoulder. 'Don't worry, Ernst. The next time we come, we'll bring you a thirty-five-foot, single-pilot flying saucer, solely for your personal convenience. You can use it to make trips away from here, when it becomes too much for you. This small craft will take you anywhere you want, allowing you to avoid Asuncion. It possesses all the capabilities of the larger saucers and is easy to fly. Compared to this, driving a car is complicated.' He squeezed Ernst's shoulder again, trying to reassure him. 'The next time we visit, Ernst. In two weeks. I can offer you nothing else for the time being, so I trust you'll accept.'

'Yes, Herr Wilson. Thank you.'

Yet even as Ernst said this, lowering his eyes, unable to meet Wilson's gaze, he was filled with the chilling conviction that his idol was toying with him, not telling the whole truth, hiding something, planning something else for him, perhaps something not good.

When he raised his eyes again, to search for the truth in Wilson's gaze, the older man had already turned away from him and was entering the saucer. The cyborgs and armed guards followed him in, then the ramp gave off a low humming sound as it slotted back into the outer body of the saucer, once more leaving it solid and visually seamless.

Instantly, Ernst retreated to the relative safety of his front veranda. He sat in his rocking chair, started rocking automatically, staring upwards as the mighty saucer ascended slowly to just above the canopy of the trees. There it hovered majestically, silently, for a moment, then it suddenly shot off as a ball of light that shrank at great speed. Soon it became just one of the many stars above the jungle, briefly hovering in outer space, then it abruptly blinked out, as if it had never been.

Lowering his gaze and glancing around his compound, Ernst saw the high walls of wood and thatch, the guards in machine-gun towers, the open fires burning outside the shacks of the native workers, the bamboo cages for the Ache prisoners, the flogging posts and coffin-shaped, windowless boxes used for punishment; the dogs, goats, chickens and pigs, the shit and piss in the open latrines. In the day it was all shadowed by the soaring tropical trees; but most nights, as right now, it was wrapped in a suffocating humidity, besieged constantly by every imaginable kind of insect and reptile, half of them venomous, others carrying deadly diseases. Surveying it all with his weakening eyes, through senses jaded and increasingly numbed, Ernst accepted that he really *was* in hell and receiving God's punishment.

When he thought back on World War II and his early days as an idealistic young engineer, then of Himmler and Kammler and Nebe and the SS, then of his wife and children (all betrayed by him, before dying in an Allied air-raid) and, finally, of what he was doing in this vile jungle, he understood why he was being punished and knew that he deserved it.

Ernst shed sentimental tears, then called out for his servant-girl, Rosa. When she advanced reluctantly from the darkness, on bare feet, clearly frightened, Ernst knew that he would make her suffer as he was suffering, easing his pain by inflicting it on someone even less fortunate.

He had created his own hell on Earth and now had to rule it. The devil, he

knew, did not need disciples; he just needed victims.
Ernst now needed a lot of those.
‘Tonight we will do things you can’t imagine,’ he said to Rosa as she knelt obediently, fearfully, in front of him. ‘Now go into the bedroom, take your clothes off, and lie down on the floor. Don’t move a muscle, don’t make a sound, until I come to you. Do you understand, woman?’
‘Yes, master,’ she whispered.
Ernst burned in the scalding light of his sick desires and sad self-destruction. Waving Rosa away and glancing up at the stars, he wondered which one of them was actually Wilson’s flying saucer. Then, in the full knowledge of his loss, he filled up with choking fury and pain.
‘I won’t stay here,’ he whispered. ‘I won’t! *As God is my witness*!’
So saying, he stood up and entered the spacious, eerily empty log-house, to take out his frustration on Rosa in ways unimaginable.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Flying into Washington DC at the end of January, 1959, Dwight was picked up at the airport by Bob Jackson and his wife, Thelma, the sexy blonde WAC corporal who had acted as secretary to both of them during the good days at the ATIC. Though not quite as slim as she had been when Dwight had last seen her, Thelma was still an attractive, good-humoured woman.

‘A matinée idol!’ she exclaimed as she gave Dwight a hug. ‘You haven’t changed a bit, sweetheart.’
‘If I weren’t in a public place,’ Dwight replied, ‘I’d throw you on the floor and try my best.’
‘Which wouldn’t be good enough,’ Thelma said.
Dwight laughed. ‘Don’t you know it?’
The ice was broken as easily as it only can be with true friends and they left the airport, driven by Thelma in a battered old Ford, like folk who had never been parted. Dwight sat in the rear.
‘A damned mess,’ he said.
‘My car?’
‘Yeah, Bob, your car. Sooner or later we all need a hearse, but it doesn’t need to be *this* bad.’
‘In American society,’ Bob retaliated, ‘a man’s judged by his automobile and his woman. Given this, though my wheels aren’t of the best, I’m still on top of the heap.’

‘Now you know how he suckered me,’ Thelma said, lighting up a Camel and exhaling a cloud of smoke as she drove. ‘I couldn’t resist his Irish blarney. He made me feel like a queen.’
‘Which you are,’ Dwight said.
‘You’re so straight-laced, Dwight,’ Thelma replied teasingly, ‘that hearing those words coming out of your mouth makes me melt and have wicked thoughts.’
‘Sorry.’
‘Don’t apologise,’ Bob said. ‘Instead, take her words as words of wisdom. Never ignore a good woman.’
‘I won’t,’ Dwight promised.
He said it without confidence, even as his chest heaved with a spasm of overwhelming love. It was love for Beth, stabbing through him like a knife, opening him with a surgeon’s precision to all the pain, joy and uncertainty of being back with her.
Getting together again hadn’t been all that easy, though it had certainly been worth it in the end. At first, when Dwight moved back in, he and Beth had been awkward with each other, no longer protected by the ease of familiarity and having to inch slowly towards one another. As with most such relationships, their greatest difficulty was in approaching each other in bed after having spent so much time apart. The first night had been bad, an embarrassed, tentative touching that had filled Dwight with the shock of renewed desire, yet simultaneously unnerved him, making him feel like an inexperienced schoolboy who didn’t know what to do. Giving up, they had slept in each other’s arms and awakened self-conscious with each other – though the rest of that day Dwight felt remarkably alive, skin glowing with the indelible touch of Beth’s soft skin on his. It had made him feel exalted.
The next night, however, was the breaking of the ice, with Beth taking the initiative, exploring him with her hands and lips, finally taking his hardness into her mouth and exciting him to the degree where he forgot the inhibitions he had developed over the barren years of separation. Set free by her equally shy, caring administrations, surrendering to the ecstasy of pure, sensual pleasure, he had lain there, breathing heavily, his body on fire, as she sat up and straddled him, her naked body pale in the moonlight, beads of sweat glistening on her breasts and thighs, running into her pubic hair.
It was possibly a tribute to the depth of their love that even now, at his age, Dwight was convinced that he would never forget that image of Beth for as

long as he lived: naked, sweat-slicked, her hair falling across her face, legs spread and spine curved, full breasts thrusting out, emphasising the hardened nipples, as she moved up and down on him, turning this way and that, kneading his chest, belly and thighs with electrified fingers and an instinct that seemed to anticipate his every need and desire. He had stared up at her, wide-eyed, running his hands frantically over her, squeezing her breasts, stroking her belly, gripping her hips to let their movement excite him to the limit; then thrusting up with his groin, trying to penetrate even deeper, to bury himself so deeply inside her that he became a part of her – all of that in beams of moonlight that fell on the bed they had purchased two days after returning from their honeymoon in Niagara Falls, thirteen years ago, when they were younger and less complicated. For that reason, when Beth came, her body shuddering astride him, and he followed closely, feeling as if he was dying, he knew that their love had a solid basis that could see them through. That thought, also, exalted him. Though even now he could not shake off the anguish caused by the knowledge, gained painfully through the separation, that nothing was permanent.

‘So how’s Beth?’ Bob asked, as if reading Dwight’s mind.

‘She’s fine, Bob. So’s Nichola.’

‘God, Nichola!’ Bob exclaimed, shaking his head from side to side in wonder. ‘When I saw her last Christmas I nearly freaked. They grow up so fast.’

‘How old is she?’ Thelma asked.

‘Twelve,’ Dwight said.

‘Oh, boy!’ Thelma exclaimed, driving the car in a distracted, deceptively careless way. ‘I can’t believe you have a kid that age already. She was just a *baby* in Dayton.’

‘Born there,’ Dwight explained. ‘When you and I were young, Thelma.’

She chuckled at that, exhaling more cigarette smoke. ‘Yeah, right, back in the ATIC at Wright-Patterson AFB. Weren’t *those* the days?’

‘Good days,’ Bob said. ‘You used to let me feel your leg beneath your desk, right there in the office, and my car was our regular passion pit when the sun had gone down. Now we only get together in bed, which shows how much we’ve aged.’

Thelma laughed outright at that. She had an infectious ‘dirty’ laugh. ‘True enough,’ she confessed without blushing. ‘But you’ve got your times mixed up. You were feeling my leg under the desk in 1948, Bob. The passion pit

entered the vernacular about 1955, along with Elvis the Pelvis. God I love Elvis!'
'Elvis killed us all,' Dwight said. 'He had the voice, the looks and the swinging groin; we only have the latter.'
'I'm sure Beth's perfectly happy with that,' Thelma said, puffing another cloud of smoke from brightly painted grinning lips. 'I know that deep down *I* am.'
'Deep down,' Bob said mournfully. When Thelma affectionately squeezed his arm, he grinned and glanced at Dwight's reflection in the rear-view mirror. 'So the reunion's working out okay, I take it? You and Beth are okay?'
'Yes, Bob, we're fine.'
'Are you sure?'
'Yes.'
'You seem a bit down right now.'
'I'm just a bit nervous, that's all. Meting this Dr...'
'Epstein.'
'Right, Dr Epstein.'
'Nothing else?'
Brushing his windblown hair from his eyes, Dwight glanced out of the open window of the car. They were crossing the Potomac, on Memorial Bridge, and Dwight could see all the way along the Mall to the Capitol building. Washington DC always made him think of London, England, though he had never been there. He'd only seen it in books.
'Well,' he confessed finally, 'there *is* something else. The reunion's been fine – I mean physically and emotionally – but something's a bit off with Beth. I don't mean her and me... It's something else... I mean..'
'Out with it,' Bob said.
Dwight nodded. 'She's having bad dreams. Nightmares, in fact. Even when we've had a good night together, making love, once asleep she often wakes up screaming.'
'UFO dreams?'
'Yep.'
'Men in black?'
'Yep. All the things she's read about and been told about, not only when we were at the ATIC, but since I left home and went on the bottle. Thing is, she never had those dreams, or nightmares, until I returned home. We're happy

being back together
– I swear to it, folks, and I think I can speak for Beth – but she only started having those dreams when we got back together. I guess that's what's bothering me.'
Even Thelma, normally so ebullient, was silent for a moment, her lips slightly open, exhaling a stream of smoke, eyes focused on the buildings slipping past as the car cut into New Hampshire Avenue, heading for 21st Street.
'These dreams?' Bob asked eventually, as if reluctant to do so. 'That's all they are? Dreams?'
'What do you mean?'
'She dreams of UFOs and men in black?'
'Right.'
'Has she said she's had actual contact? I mean, any experiences *other* than dreams?'
'No,' Dwight replied emphatically. 'Definitely not. I specifically asked her that very question and she was adamant that she was only having dreams and...' He shrugged. 'Feeling... *haunted*. She says she *feels* that she's being watched, but that's all it is – only a feeling. She thinks the feelings might be related to the dreams – a kind of hangover from them – so she's not worried about that aspect of it. It's the dreams, specifically, that are bothering her. What do *you* think, Bob?'
Bob took his time replying as Thelma, still puffing clouds of cigarette smoke, turned the car into 21st Street.
'Well,' Bob said carefully, 'obviously the dreams are related to all she's heard from you, me and others during our years of UFO investigations – the very investigations that broke up your relationship.'
'Agreed,' Dwight said.
'On the other hand, I'm concerned that she didn't have similar dreams when you and I were actually at the ATIC – and, in fact, didn't have them during your threeyear separation – but has only had them since you returned home.'
'That's my concern,' Dwight said.
'So given that your reunion has been successful – '
'Which it has been – wonderful for both of us.'
' – I can only say that I'm concerned that your return home and, more unfortunately, my visit to your home, has possibly put you back in the spotlight – which would, of course, include Beth. Jesus H. Christ, I certainly

hope not, but that could be the case.'
Dwight felt the darkness moving in to enclose him in broad daylight. 'You mean the people who stole my UFO photos – the men in black – might be back on my trail.'
'Yes, Dwight, I do.'
'And you think they can affect people's dreams?'
'Affect their minds, yes. And since it's known that I'm now working for the APII and have been to see you...'
'Oh, my God,' Dwight whispered.
Thelma braked to a halt outside the Hampshire Hotel, smiled as brightly as she could manage, and said, 'Here you are, Dwight. Your overnight stop. I'm going shopping while you check in and then go off with Bob to see Dr Epstein. Just remember that after I've been shopping, I'll be coming right back here, so no belly dancers with walnuts in their navels, no bored business ladies in your room. You can go see Dr Epstein, then come back here and read the Gideon bible until I return. You got that?'
'Absolutely,' Bob said.
'Damned right,' Dwight added.
He and Bob clambered out of the car, removed the former's overnight bag from the trunk, and entered the Hampshire Hotel as Thelma drove away.

Driving back to Carillon Park after dropping Dwight off, Beth felt good for five minutes – the frost gleaming everywhere, the sky blue and brilliant, the air sharp and invigorating. Dwight's smile as he waved goodbye before disappearing through the departure gates – but within seconds of leaving the airport, even warmed by the recollection of Dwight's fond smile, she was attacked by that frightening feeling of being... *pursued*.

It was a feeling that had dogged her every day since Dwight had returned home: the feeling that no matter how good they were together, they were being threatened by something that neither could see or identify. That suspicion, which was based on all the things that had caused Dwight harm before – mainly reports of UFOs and stories about men in black – had led Beth, by night, to a succession of frightening dreams and, by day, to this feeling that she was never alone, that she was being watched somehow.

Now, as she drove along the stretch of road that passed the gas station where Dwight, when drinking heavily, had lived his bachelor life, she recalled the Dwight she had met for the first time as a fellow student at the University of Dayton. Though notably handsome and a member of the

baseball team, therefore highly desirable to the other female students, he had been surprisingly reserved and even, as some put it, old-fashioned in his beliefs, which included respect for his parents, the family unit and the Roman Catholic Church, a non-fanatical but genuine patriotism, and the general conviction that a man must do what a man must do. Those slightly chauvinistic but otherwise admirably virtuous views he had picked up as one of the four children of Ralph Randall, an aeronautical engineer working as a freelance consultant for some of the many experimental aviation laboratories in the area, and his wife, Barbara, a public relations writer for the Miami Conservancy District floodcontrol project. Both were church-going Roman Catholics, highly active in the community, but possessing a healthy sense of humour. Beth, whose own Roman Catholic parents shared similar views, was totally charmed by Dwight and fell in love with him shortly after meeting him at the college Prom, to which she was taken by another young man, now scarcely remembered.

Bound by convention and being typical of their times, Beth and Dwight had dated formally, swooned together numerous evenings in Dwight's car, usually at drive-in movies, but did not actually consummate the relationship, agreeing that they should wait until they were married, which they planned to do shortly. This plan, however, was thwarted by the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour. Almost immediately after that shocking event, with America entering the war on the side of the Allies, Dwight, who had inherited his father's interest in the aviation history of Dayton, was drafted into the Army Air Force and served as a bombardier and radar operator, flying to India, China and the Pacific with the original B-29 wing. Returning to college at the end of the war, four years later and a lot more mature, he was convinced that he had found what he wanted to do in life – be a full-time member of the Army Air Force – and so kept his reserved status, flying as a navigator in an Air Force Reserve Troop Carrier wing while working night and day to gain his degree in aeronautical engineering. He also married Beth, finally consummating their relationship during their honeymoon in Niagara Falls.

Though their initially shy sexual explorations gradually blossomed into an even more deeply satisfying emotional relationship, Beth knew that Dwight could not forget his wartime experiences and would not be kept at home by love alone. She was therefore not surprised when, after gaining his aeronautical engineering degree, he applied to go back on active duty. Luckily, he was posted straight to the recently formed Air Technical

Intelligence Centre, located at Wright-Patterson AFB, right here in Dayton, where he and Beth moved into married quarters.

Driving past the garage where Dwight had worked during his period as an alcoholic ‘bachelor’ – the darkest days of their marriage – Beth was reminded of how, while loving Dwight, she had resented being an Air Force wife, loathed the insular life of the married community in and around the base, and had made her resentment known to him – too loudly, too frequently. To make matters worse, her resentment had become most vocal even as Dwight was suffering from the problems created by his UFO investigations for the ATIC. She therefore blamed herself, at least in part, for his plunge into alcoholic despair and subsequent departure from the Air Force he had once loved so dearly.

Now reunited with him, her residual guilt made her work even harder at keeping him happy and providing a degree of protection from the troubles that would, she was convinced, come about from his return to UFO investigations. She also knew, however, that only by returning to that work would he fully regain the pride he had lost when he left the Air Force. For that reason, and that reason alone, she had asked his old friend and Air Force buddy, Bob Jackson, to persuade him into going to work as the Dayton stringer for Dr Frederick Epstein’s highly respected Aerial Phenomena Investigations Institute, based in Washington DC. It was Beth’s belief that the many trips Dwight would be compelled to make to the organisation, which would also give him the opportunity to visit Bob and Thelma, would be good for him. It was also her belief that Dwight was still obsessed with solving the mystery of why the Air Force was harassing UFO investigators, even to the point of ruining their lives, and that he could only do so through a dedicated, well funded civilian UFO organisation like the APII. On both counts, then, she felt that his teaming up with Bob and Dr Epstein, while certainly inviting trouble of one kind, would in the end be good for him. Whether Beth was right or wrong in that assumption, it was, she had decided, a chance they would both have to take.

So thinking, Beth glanced out of the open window of the car... and saw that she was still passing the garage where Dwight used to work.

Startled, she then realised that she was not in fact driving, but had pulled into the side of the road and parked, almost opposite the garage in this otherwise desolate area. Unable to recall having done so, she felt disorientated and checked the time on her wristwatch.

The hands had stopped moving.
Shocked, suddenly frightened, she glanced left and right, behind the car, to the front, hardly knowing what she was looking for. The fields on both sides of the road were empty, as was the road itself, front and rear, but she was convinced that something was nearby and exerting some kind of force against her.
She tried the door of the car, but found that it was jammed shut. When she tried turning on the ignition, the car would not start.
Trapped, feeling oddly violated, she just sat there, gazing about her, trying to see what it was that she could feel as an invisible... *presence*.
Yet there was nothing unusual out there... Only the flat fields, the straight, empty road... and the garage at the far side of that road.
There was something strange about the garage. Its front door was open, swinging in and out with the wind, and banging repeatedly against its frame.
There was no sign of the new owner, Frank Bancroft... neither inside at the cash register, nor outside by the gas pumps.
Beth thought that was odd.
Something else was odd... When she looked more carefully, she noticed that the tall grass around the garage was quivering and being bent as if by the wind... but in an unnatural way. Behind and at both sides of the garage, the tall grass of the fields was virtually motionless, indicating that no wind was blowing there. The grass was only bending in a long, narrow line that formed an immense semicircle, enclosing the garage and stopping on the verge where the field met the tarmac road.
At least Beth *thought* it stopped there... until she noticed that the dust on the road was also being whipped up – again, only in a fine line that ran across the road to the front and rear of her car, the same distance away in both directions, about 170 feet in both directions. Within and outside those two fine lines of spiralling dust, no dust or debris was stirring.
Feeling increasingly unreal and frightened, Beth glanced in the opposite direction, at the fields on the other side of the road – the side she was parked on – and saw that the two lines of dust curved into that field where the grass was also bent and quivering, forming another large arc that ended on both sides of the road.
The lines of dust across the road, in front of, and behind, the car, joined the two arcs of bent, quivering grass to form an immense circle that enclosed the car and garage. Outside that circle, the grass was not moving at all.

Even as Beth studied that huge circle, she saw the tips of the grass slowly turning black and smoking a little.
Suddenly, the car started shaking, as if on a conveyor belt. Startled, Beth grabbed hold of the steering wheel. The car continued shaking – even though it wasn't otherwise moving – and Beth looked on, disbelieving, as the bent, quivering grass turned blacker and formed a great circle covered in smoke. Just as she thought the smouldering grass was about to burst into flames, it crumpled into black powder and the smoke started drifting away. Soon there was nothing but that immense, dark circle, formed by the ashes of grass, dead and charred black.
The car stopped its unnatural shaking and the door locks, which had been jammed in the closed position, clicked free of their own accord.
When Beth turned the key in the ignition, the engine kicked into life again.
Impelled by a combination of terror and helpless curiosity, Beth turned the engine off, then opened the door and leaned out of the vehicle to glance along the road in both directions. No other cars were approaching and the road was deserted, running as straight as an arrow under a sky filling up with low clouds.
Looking across the road, Beth saw that the door of the garage had stopped its banging, though it was now hanging open and there was still no sign of Frank Bancroft.
Taking a deep breath, Beth glanced directly above the car. At first she saw nothing but the gathering clouds, pregnant with rain... Then, above the clouds, she saw what looked like a circular light, about the size of a dime but shrinking rapidly, though still casting its striations downwards through the clouds. Even as Beth studied that light, trying to ascertain if it was a separate entity or merely an illusion caused by a combination of cloud and striated sunlight, it shrank to no more than a gleaming speck, then abruptly blinked out.
Without thinking, though with racing heart, Beth clambered out of her car and crossed the road to the forecourt of Frank Bancroft's garage, where Dwight had once lived and worked. When she had passed the gas pumps and was approaching the open front door of the store, she slowed down, feeling more frightened than ever by the unnatural silence and realising that sweat was trickling down her face.
Stopping by the open door, she glanced up at the sky again, checking that the strange, circular light had indeed disappeared. Satisfied that it had, she

glanced across the flat field and saw that the great circle of black ash was still clearly visible.

Shivering, though sweaty and flushed with dread, she reached the open door and glanced tentatively into the store, scanning the shadowy space behind the cash register for a sign of Frank Bancroft. He was nowhere to be seen. The store, though empty, seemed untouched.

With her heart now racing so fast she thought it would burst, Beth entered the store and glanced about her. All the stock on the shelves – cans of oil, cleaning solvents, light bulbs, tools, maps, rubber floor mats, seat coverings and other automobile and driver products – was as it should have been. The cash register, Beth noticed, was firmly closed.

No sign, then, of a hold-up.

Relieved just a little, but with her heart still racing, Beth advanced farther into the store and stepped around the far side of the counter containing the cash register.

There she gasped instinctively and froze in horror.

Frank Bancroft had fallen out of his chair and was lying flat on his back, but in a dreadfully contorted position and with his eyes popping out of his head, staring at something that had clearly terrified him. He had foamed at the mouth, evacuated his bowels, and fallen out of his chair as he collapsed.

Beth didn't need a doctor to tell her what had happened. This man had died of a heart attack brought on by sheer terror.

Now terrified as well, Beth gasped again, covered her mouth with her hand, then ran back to her car. She turned on the engine, which started with no trouble, then raced the car along the road, not stopping until she came to her local police station, near Carillon Park. There she informed the officer in charge, Deputy Marshall Tom Clooney, red-faced and pot-bellied, about Frank Bancroft's death. She said nothing about her blackout, the stopping of her wristwatch, the malfunctioning of her car, the smoking grass and the great circle of black ash. Convinced that the amiable Clooney would think she had gone mad, she decided to keep her mouth shut and relate only the details concerning her finding of Frank Bancroft's corpse.

When the report was completed, the cop on duty promised to have the body collected and the garage closed up. Relieved, Beth left the police station and drove on home.

She was still terrified.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Once booked into the Hampshire Hotel, downtown, Dwight and Bob walked the short distance along 21st Street to the Aerial Phenomena Investigations Institute – the same modest, Federal-styled building located just off Pennsylvania Avenue where, six years ago, Dwight had given a deep background interview to the well-known astronomer and astrophysicist, Dr Frederick Epstein, Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), and now the dedicated, hard-working head of the APII.

Epstein, Dwight noted, hadn't changed much in the intervening years. Back in 1953, because of his rather old-fashioned, prematurely greying Vandyke beard, he'd looked older than his age; now, though still only forty-seven, but with his beard even greyer, he looked ten years older than that. Nevertheless, he had good-natured, distinguished features, lively hazel eyes, a ready smile, and a tendency to stroke his beard when thinking. Slightly dishevelled, he seemed right at home in an office cluttered with filing cabinets, loose files, heaped reports, old newspapers, magazines and photos of UFOs.

The walls, also, were covered in photos of UFOs and poster-sized charts. One showed the most commonly reported UFO shapes, grouped into flat discs, domed discs, Saturn or double-domed discs, hemispherical discs, flattened spheres, spherical, elliptical, triangular and cylindrical. Another chart was divided into two illustrated sections, one showing the most commonly reported UFO formations, the other showing UFO manoeuvres both singly and in formation. Other charts showed the world-wide locations and flight directions of the major UFO waves from 1896 to the present; major UFO events in the United States and overseas; the major areas of alleged magnetic deviation around the world, including the North and South Poles; and the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the world's leading civilian organisations.

'A major problem we're having,' Epstein was saying as Dwight removed his gaze from the wall charts, 'is that the checking of UFO reports is being made more difficult by the man-made satellites circling Earth in increasing numbers and now, in the case of the unmanned Soviet *Lunik*, passing the Moon to go into orbit around the sun.'

'Which it did only yesterday,' Bob reminded them as he unwrapped a stick of chewing gum and popped it into his mouth.

'Correct,' Epstein said, distractedly stroking his beard. 'For that very reason,

Dwight, I’m really glad you’re considering getting back into this business. We can certainly do with all the expert help we can get. You remember the Levelland sightings?’

‘Yep,’ Dwight said, feeling comfortable in this company, particularly since Bob Jackson had been indirectly responsible for reuniting him with Beth and Nichola, thus giving him back his sense of purpose. ‘Texas. November 1957. The sightings caused quite a stir.’

‘They surely did.’ Epstein picked a report off his desk and studied it thoughtfully. ‘I’ve been studying this case in detail, Dwight, so let me refresh your memory by reading from my completed report.’

As Epstein read out the details, it all came back to Dwight in a rush. The events in Levelland, Texas, had formed the spectacular climax to the biggest year in UFO reports since 1952. The sightings had begun at 11.00pm on November 2 and ended at 2.00am the following morning. All the reports were of glowing, yellow-white, torpedo- or egg-shaped objects, approximately seventy-five to 200 feet long or in diameter, that had landed on the roads around Levelland, forcing oncoming cars to brake, stopping their ignitions, and emitting quite a bit of heat before taking off again, after which the cars’s ignitions had restarted.

The first sighting was at 11.00pm on the night of November 2, just north of Levelland, when one of the objects flew towards the automobile of two witnesses, causing the motor and lights to fail. When the witnesses got out of their vehicle to view the object more clearly, it came so close, they were forced to throw themselves to the ground. Considerable heat was felt as the object passed over them. When the object left the area, the automobile’s ignition and lights came back on.

An hour later, at midnight, a driver four miles east of Levelland was stopped by a brightly glowing, egg-shaped object, about two hundred feet in diameter, that was resting in the middle of the road. As the driver approached the object, his car’s engine and lights failed. When the object took off, rising vertically to a height of approximately two hundred feet and then shooting off rapidly, the witness’s car started up again.

A few minutes later, another witness, driving eleven miles north of Levelland, called the police to report having exactly the same kind of sighting and experience.

Five minutes after midnight, a witness driving nine miles east of Levelland got out of his car when its engine and lights failed. He was about to look

under the hood when he saw an egg-shaped object sitting on the road ahead. He later described it as being about seventy-five to a hundred feet wide, made of what looked like aluminium, and giving off a white glow with a greenish tint. Frightened, he got back into his car and watched the object for a few minutes, until it took off and disappeared. When the object had flown out of sight, the witness's car started again.

Fifteen minutes later, nine miles north of Levelland, another car stalled as it approached a similar object sitting on a dirt road. When the object ascended vertically to an altitude of about three hundred feet, then shot off and disappeared, the car's engine started up again and its lights came back on.

After receiving this latest report, Levelland Patrolman A. J. Fowler sent two deputies out to investigate. They later reported seeing bright lights in the sky, but had no ignition problems with their vehicle. However, a few minutes after they called in their first report, a witness driving just west of town saw a 'large orange ball of fire' coming towards him. It settled on the road about a quarter of a mile ahead. When the witness approached it, his car's engine cut out and its lights failed. When the lights ascended a few minutes later, the car started up again.

Thirty minutes later, a truck driver informed the police that as he was driving northeast of Levelland, his truck's engine and headlights failed when he approached a brilliantly glowing, egg-shaped object that was straddling the road ahead. When he got out of his truck to investigate, the object shot up vertically with a roar and then flew away. The truck's engine and headlights then came back on.

By this time, other deputies in the area had received similar reports and were out on the roads, frantically investigating. While driving about five miles outside the city, a sheriff and his deputy saw a 'streak of light' with a 'reddish glow' on the highway, about three or four hundred yards ahead, lighting up the whole area. A few miles behind the sheriff and deputy, on the same road, two patrolmen saw a 'strangelooking flash' that appeared to be close to the ground about a mile in front of them. The last sighting of the evening was made by another policeman, who saw an object travelling so fast it looked like no more than 'a flash of light' shooting from east to west.

'In other words,' Epstein now summarised from his own report, 'twelve drivers, including police patrolmen, reported seeing a large, glowing, egg-shaped flying object and three more reported an unusual flash – all in a single, three-hour period covering the midnight of November second and

third.’
‘Forming a kind of grand climax to the biggest UFO flap since 1952,’ Bob added, ‘the sightings caused the Air Force a lot of embarrassment. They didn’t investigate the affair until days after it took place, sent only one man to do the job, failed to interview nine of the fifteen witnesses, and stated falsely that lightning had been in the area at the time of the sightings. Under pressure from the public, the assistant secretary of defence insisted that the ATIC submit a preliminary analysis to the press. When Captain George Gregory – the head of our once beloved, now relatively useless Project Blue Book – did so, he claimed that the evidence was too slight for proper investigation, that only three of the witnesses could be located, and that contrary to reports, the object, or objects, had only been visible for a few seconds. He also reiterated that the sightings had been caused by lightning and storm conditions in the area – none of which were actually present at the time. Nevertheless, the Air Force’s final report blamed the sightings on unusual weather phenomena of an electrical nature, suggesting ball lightning or St Elmo’s Fire, and again dragged up non-existent stormy conditions, including mist, rain, thunderstorms and lightning. With the aid of Donald Menzel, they then tried to blame the recent wave of sightings, including the Levelland affair, on the launching of the second Russian *Sputnik*. But when this failed to wash, the public uproar became so loud that the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, NICAP, was able to press for Congressional hearings.’
‘Yeah, I read about that,’ Dwight said. ‘But I haven’t heard much about the hearings since then.’
‘No, you wouldn’t have,’ Bob told him. ‘In August last year, John McCormack’s House Sub-Committee on Atmospheric Phenomena requested a week-long hearing in closed, secret session, but any hope that the hearing would be a fair one was destroyed when the House Sub-Committee decided to take no further interest in the matter.’
‘However, what we discovered right here at the APII,’ Epstein said, ‘has given us even more cause for concern. Last December, the Air Force published a staff study that came down heavily on the three major civilian UFO groups, accusing us of being biased and sensationalist. To make matters worse, we also learned that the Robertson Panel, in making their recommendations back in 1953 regarding civilian UFO groups, had used the chilling phrase...’ Epstein paused for a moment to pick up another

wellthumbed sheet from his desk and read from it. '*The apparent irresponsibility and the possible use of such groups for subversive purposes should be kept in mind.*' He let the sheet fall back on the desk, as if it was contaminating his fingers. 'We've also recently learnt that the FBI and the CIA are keeping extensive records on people involved in UFO investigations, including the members of our own organisation. Should you be considering joining us, I feel it's only fair that you know this. You've already had a lot of trouble with the Air Force; you'll get more if you join us.'

Recalling his dire experience with the Air Force, due to his involvement with UFO research, Dwight knew exactly what Epstein meant. Nevertheless, he said, 'I'm willing to take that chance. Now that Bob's got me interested again, I won't rest until I find out why the Air Force, which so clearly was concerned about UFOs when we were in Project Blue Book, went to such lengths to frustrate our investigations and turn Project Blue Book into a farce. It was, and remains, a contradiction that still keeps me awake at night.'

'That's precisely why we want you,' Epstein said, standing up and coming around his desk to shake Dwight's hand again. 'Welcome aboard.'

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Even before opening his eyes in his bed in his suite of rooms near the summit of the mountain in Antarctica, Wilson recalled his dream and realised that it had *not* been a dream, but a powerfully vivid, telepathic exploration of his colony. Having practised meditation and astral projection for years, he had at last developed the ability to see with his 'inner eye'. This morning, in a state of half sleep, just before awakening properly, he had roamed from his bedroom near the summit, down through the hacked-out interior of the mountain, to the various layers of the colony: the guard rooms just below him, then the computer rooms; then, farther down, the laboratories and surgeries, the machine-shops and storage facilities, then the slave accommodations, dining rooms and ablutions; and, finally, at the base of the mountain, the great landing pads and maintenance hangars for the flying saucers. He had made that journey in his mind, seeing everything clearly.

Even as his body was rotting with age, with its various organs being replaced one after the other, his Extra-Sensory Perception, practiced daily for about seventy years, was increasing dramatically.

Opening his eyes, he gazed through the panoramic windows of the suite at the vast, snow-covered wastelands of the Antarctic. All white. Everything. Except for the sky. The gleaming mountains and valleys stretching out to where that sheet of sheer blue met the white horizon, though that, too, was often rendered a silvery white by windswept snow and frost. Light. Lots of light. A unique and dazzling vision. The light flashed off the mountain peaks and glaciers as snow broke up, rolled down the mountain slopes, or drifted like powder on the wind, reflecting and bending the rays of the blinding sun. The Antarctic was vast, supremely beautiful, and empty. There were no people out there. No noise. It was the end of the world.

Sitting upright, Wilson glanced around the bedroom: a functional room, with pineboard walls, clothes closets and a couple of chests-of-drawers. There were no paintings on the walls, no decorations or ornaments of any kind. There were, however, a series of TV monitor screens banked along one wall and controlled from the control-panel on his bedside cabinet. Though Wilson was now able to use his ESP to scan the colony, he could more easily do so by means of the spy cameras located in more areas of the underground complex and transmitting back to the TV monitors in his bedroom and study.

Switching on the monitors, as he did every morning before getting out of bed, he used his hand-control to flick from one screen to the other and check that everything was in order: the great saucers on their landing pads in the cavernous space hacked out of the mountain’s rock; the massive workshops where the saucers were constructed; the laboratories where surgical experiments were conducted on captured human beings and animals, some dead, others alive; the storage rooms for the collection of frozen human heads, limbs and organs; the slave accommodations where the nightshift workers were sleeping; and the dormitory-styled quarters for the comfort girls. Everywhere he checked, he saw hundreds of men and women at work, including white-coated scientists, technicians and surgeons; slave-workers in grey coveralls; and the flying-saucer crewmembers in their black flight suits – all illuminated in the arc lights powered by self-charging generators and fixed high on the walls of solid rock, as were the spy cameras. The underground colony was a hive of activity. Everything was in order.

Satisfied, Wilson slipped out of bed and padded on bare feet into the adjoining bathroom where he attended to his ablutions, then had an invigorating cold shower. After drying himself, he put on a silk dressing gown and returned to the bedroom, where he sat on the edge of the bed,

again facing the panoramic window with its breathtaking view of Antarctica. Phoning through to the quarters of the comfort girls, he asked the matron to send him someone trained in electronic stimulation. Then he placed the phone back on its cradle and patiently waited.

The girl arrived within minutes, entering via the elevator in the study and coming into the bedroom from there. Wilson's taste in comfort girls changed from time to time - sometimes he enjoyed Eurasians, other times blacks, sometimes the Ache women flown in from Paraguay by Ernst Stoll – but his present taste was for slim white girls, preferably no younger than eighteen, no older than twenty. The girl who now entered fitted the bill exactly, being slim, blonde, eighteen years old, and dressed in a diaphanous robe that emphasised every curve in her body with each step she took. Though subdued with a constant supply of Valium and other sedatives, she was still a little nervous of Wilson and kept her head bowed.

'Your name?' Wilson asked.

'Clare Collins.'

'Where are you from?'

'Albuquerque, New Mexico.'

'When were you abducted?'

'I think about eighteen months ago.'

'You don't know the precise date?'

'No, sir, I've forgotten.'

'Have you forgotten a lot about your previous life?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Forgetting more every day?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Good. Soon you won't remember a thing about it. Then you can come off your

daily sedation. Do you know what I want?'

'Matron said the stimulator.'

'That's correct. You've used one before?'

'Yes, sir.'

'On me?'

'No sir. On some others. This is my first time up here.'

'Take your robe off,' Wilson said.

The girl nodded, then took hold of the hem of her garment to tug it up her shapely

legs, off her perfect body, and finally over her head. After letting the garment fall to the floor, she stood there with her hands by her sides and her head slightly lowered. She had long legs, broad hips, a slim waist and firm breasts. Her skin, which had been sun-tanned when she was abducted, was now milky white.

Seeing her, Wilson wanted her, though he could do little about it because he could no longer obtain an erection without special help. Nevertheless, for the good of his mental health, he required sensual stimulation and the sight of this lovely, naked girl was an aid in obtaining it.

‘The stimulator is in there,’ he said, pointing to a closet. ‘Bring it out and proceed.’

Opening the closet door, the naked girl wheeled out a mobile electronic console. Pushing it to the side of the bed, she raised its lid and lay it backward until it formed a tray. Withdrawing vibrating pads and electrodes fixed to cables from inside the console, she laid them side by side on the tray. She then glanced questioningly at Wilson, received his nod of consent, and reached out to untie the belt of his dressing gown. After slowly drawing the robe off his shoulders and down his body, she started when she saw the numerous scars criss-crossing his skin – the visible signs of his many surgical operations.

‘Don’t worry,’ Wilson reassured her. ‘They don’t hurt anymore.’

Instinctively, he ran his fingers along the most recent scar, which ran across his left breast. This was from an operation to replace his old piezoelectric crystal pacemaker with a new model. Eventually, so he hoped, he would receive a pacemaker with a plutonium power source, weighing practically nothing and lasting much longer, but a successful model had yet to be developed.

The girl nodded, relieved. ‘You want oil, sir?’

‘Yes,’ Wilson said, stretching out on his back on the bed to let her begin. She did so by pouring slightly heated olive oil onto her hands, then rubbing it into his skin, starting with his chest, moving down to his stomach, then sliding her fingers through his pubic hair and around his penis. Once down there, she rubbed the oil in around his scrotum, onto his inner thighs, then around his hips, back over his belly and down again to the genital area. Then, taking his penis in her oil-soaked right hand, she massaged it tenderly, expertly, eventually managing to raise it a little.

Watching her with his unblinking gaze, taking in the rise and fall of her

breasts, the full nipples, the flat belly running down to her blonde pubic hair between perfectly formed, smooth thighs, Wilson recalled how, even in adolescence, though helplessly aroused by sexual thoughts and feelings, he had translated his desire into a set of equations that enabled him to disassociate himself from the fallacy of romantic love and treat sex as a purely physiological necessity, like pissing or shitting. Now, even as his 'comfort girl', the abducted young beauty, Clare Collins, released his slight erection from her oil-soaked fingers and, instead, used the electric vibrating pads on the most erogenous parts of his body, he was caught between his human need to surrender to pure sensual feelings and his scientific need to transcend those same feelings and remain in control.

Yet sensual feelings, he knew, were inextricably linked to mental health, and so, when the comfort girl dabbed paste onto his temples and fixed electrodes to him, he closed his eyes, shutting out the real woman, and let himself surrender to the voluptuous visions created by the stimulator. The Theta rhythms being passed through his brain at a rate of four cycles per second altered his mood and, in conjunction with the comfort girl's expert massaging, both with her oil-soaked fingers and the exquisitely soft vibrating pads, replaced his icy intellectualism with steadily rising, temporary desire. As the Theta rhythms increased gradually to a rate of seven per second, filling his head with carnal visions worthy of an adolescent, the comfort girl massaged his stomach, loins and inner thighs with the vibrating pads, manipulated his hardening penis with her oil-soaked fingers, and finally, when she sensed that he was coming, covered his penis with her lips and let him come into her mouth. Without sex, or, at least, without penetration, Wilson shuddered, orgasmed, found physical release, and was returned to his intellectual concerns, above distracting desires.

Opening his eyes, he watched the comfort girl wiping her lips dry with a tissue; she then turn off the vibrating pads and removed the electrodes from his temples. Her naked body now seemed offensive to him and he wanted no part of it.

'Put your robe on immediately,' he told her, 'then return the stimulator to the closet and take your leave.'

'Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.'

Backing away from him, keeping her head bowed, the girl put her robe back on and then wheeled the electronic console back into the closet and hurriedly left the room. Wilson heard her crossing the lounge. He waited until the door

of the elevator had opened and closed, then he put on his dressing gown and picked up the phone to order breakfast.
‘I’ll have a fruit-and-nut cereal,’ he said, ‘and a glass of white wine. Very dry. Very cold.’
He had a single glass of dry white wine with every frugal meal of the day, including breakfast. Apart from those three glasses of wine, he did not partake of alcohol. Nor did he eat meat or fish.
His breakfast was delivered by an Ache Indian who had been lobotomised to render him passive, totally obedient and easily trained. He was dressed in grey coveralls, his feet in soft felt slippers. Knowing better than to speak to Wilson, he simply placed the tray on a table that wheeled over the bed – a steel-framed hospital trolley – and then left the suite as unobtrusively as he had entered it, taking the elevator back down to the slave accommodations located near the base of the mountain.
When the Indian had departed, Wilson had his breakfast while watching the world news on his satellite-dish TV monitors, flicking repeatedly from one screen to another, one country to another, one news item to another, impatient with the triviality of human beings and their idiotic conflicts, most of which were, in his view, based on primitive notions of patriotism or religion.
Finishing his breakfast, he pushed the wheeled tray to the end of the bed, then swung his feet to the floor, shucked off his dressing gown, and proceeded to dress in his standard working outfit of black coveralls. Leaving the bedroom, he passed through his spacious, dome-shaped, steel-and-concrete study, which also offered a wonderful view of Antarctica, and took the elevator down to the parapsychological laboratories.
Like most other experimental areas of the underground colony, the laboratories had been hacked out of the interior of the mountain, with the exposed rock face covered in black pitch. The irregular shape of the walls made the enclosed spaces seem even more cavernous than they were in reality. Light came from the arc lights fixed high above the stone-flagged floors. While being adequately heated by phase-change solar-heat pumps located outside the mountain, the laboratories, with their pitchcovered rock, looked bleak and unwelcoming. Though not quite as hideous as the laboratories where doctors King and Eckhardt kept their Frankenstein’s collection of severed human heads, limbs and internal organs, the parapsychological laboratory now held its fair share of similar horrors.

These included electric chairs with buckled straps on the arms and head-braces with microphones, used for experiments that could cause haemorrhaging from the eyes, ears and nose, as well as inducing cardiac arrest or bursting the blood vessels of the brain, leading to madness or death; water tanks used for sensory-deprivation experiments on human subjects; and small, dark cells with leaded-steel doors, used for a combination of other sensory-deprivation experiments and even more cruel experiments with strobe lights flickering at a rate that caused drowsiness, nausea, acute depression or fear, absolute obedience, uncontrollable violence, and epileptic seizures.

The most notable of the horrors in this laboratory, however, was the severed head of the unfortunate Marlon Clarke, which, almost thirteen years after Clarke's abduction, was still functioning in an inhuman way with the aid of a special stereotaxic skullcap and numerous electronic hairpin implants. At one stage Clarke's severed head, then kept in a class casing with an inner temperature reduced to just above the point of freezing, had been recording dying brain-waves on the EEG machine to which it had been wired. But before those brain-waves died out completely, Dr King had used a combination of electronic implantation and injections of chemicals to revitalise them enough to keep the brain functioning. By that time, Clarke's brain, though certainly functioning again, was doing so in an insane, chaotic manner; but eventually, when attached by the severed neck to a steel-clamp base containing artificial blood vessels and wired to the still beating human heart in a temperature-controlled glass case nearby, as well as to a pair of amputated hands, it had been able to manipulate the latter in a crude fashion, making the fingers open and close as the hands crawled across the table like large, deranged spiders.

Since then, further advances had been made and now the jaw, mouth and nose of the severed head had been removed and replaced with a metal prosthetic, the neck of which was attached by a combination of electric wiring and artificial blood vessels to the body of a small Ache Indian whose head and hands had been surgically removed, the former to be replaced with Clarke's head, the latter to be replaced with myoelectric hands that looked like steel claws.

Clarke's eyes, which once had been filled with unutterable incomprehension and dread, were now unseeing and could only be revitalised by the carefully controlled input from the electronic implants of his stereotaxic skullcap.

With his metal claws, metal lower-face prosthetic and bizarre metal skullcap, the once normal human being now looked like a monstrous creature from outer space.

‘He seems pacified at last,’ Wilson said, speaking fluent Russian, to the head of the laboratory, Dr Nikoloi Tugarinov, world-famous physiologist and former Vice President of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. Listed officially in the Soviet Union as ‘missing’, Tugarinov had actually been abducted by one of Wilson’s saucer teams, ‘indoctrinated’ with a combination of drug therapy and hypnotic suggestion that did not otherwise impair his faculties, and then became a willing – or, rather, helplessly obedient – member of the parapsychological laboratory, working hand-inglove with doctors King and Eckhardt in the adjoining laboratories, where the development of cyborgs and much larger Cybernetic Anthropomorphous Machine Systems, or CAMS, was racing ahead, regardless of the cost in human suffering.

‘Yes,’ Tugarinov confirmed, also speaking Russian. ‘As you know, Dr King’s main problem was not in perfecting the psychophysical interaction between head and body, but in somehow retaining the orderly functioning of the severed head – given that it was in a state of delirium, or insanity, caused by disbelief and trauma. Having revitalised the head’s dying brain-waves, which potentially opened the brain again to shock and insanity, we solved the problem by inducing amnesia with a combination of chemicals and electric stimulation. Hideous though Mr Clarke now looks, he has no recollection of himself ever looking any different and, indeed, thinks of himself as being perfectly normal. Mr Clarke is now a prototype cyborg who, when activated, will have no recollections of his former life, will therefore think of his controller as a god, and subsequently will do exactly what he is told.’

‘Excellent,’ Wilson said. ‘But his focus seems turned inward at the moment. What’s happening to him?’

‘Amazing,’ Dr Tugarinov replied. ‘What we’re finding through the parapsychological experiments relating to cyborg mentality is that being deprived of most of their senses – the loss of a sense of smell because of the lower-face prosthetic; the breathing with lungs created artificially to enable them to withstand the extreme pressures of outer space or the seabed; the inability to speak because of the severing of the vocal cords; and the general loss of their past memories and emotions

– this particular form of deprivation has heightened their mental processes in another manner, enabling them to communicate telepathically, often over very great distances. Clarke appears to be focused inward at the moment because he's been programmed to cast his thoughts elsewhere.'

'I've developed such talents myself,' Wilson reminded him, 'by the ruthless suppression of all redundant emotion and feelings.'

'True – but look!' Dr Tugarinov pointed up at a row of monitor screens that were tilted just above the encased, severed head of the surgically mutated, partial cyborg, Marlon Clarke. The screens showed a series of different images, cloudy but distinct enough, of barbed wire fences, military installations, aircraft on the ground or in flight, and long-distance views of parabolic radar dishes. They were, as Wilson knew, all located in the United States, mostly military establishments chosen by Clarke's 'controller', Dr Tugarinov, and being telepathically relayed to the TV monitors wired up to the cyborg's stereotaxic skullcap and keyed into a highly advanced computer system.

In the West, electronic miniaturisation with an integrated circuit using a single tiny chip of silicon had been demonstrated for the first time the previous year, but Wilson's scientists, unrestrained in every way, were already well advanced in computer technology and had, in fact, used their first crude silicon chips as part of their secret barter with the United States government.

'I know what you're showing me,' Wilson said. 'But what's so special this time?'

'Watch closely,' Tugarinov said, using the computer keyboard to increase or decrease the basic rhythmic patterns of Marlon Clarke's brain while flooding it with other impulses from the implants of the stereotaxic skullcap. The eyes in the severed head now attached by the neck to a cyborg torso – half man, half machine – suddenly widened, moved left and right above the hideous lower-face metal prosthetic, then seemed to lose focus as the mental impulses thus agitated leaped over time and space. The screens above Clarke's head, which had previously shown a series of murky monochrome images, now cleared to show what Wilson recognised instantly as, first the exterior, then the interior, of one of his own large flying saucers. This, however, dissolved almost immediately and was replaced by the image of a smaller, less sophisticated saucer ascending vertically from what appeared to be part of the White Sands Proving Ground.

Surprised, Wilson practically stood on tiptoe in order to check the images more clearly. The flying saucer on the screen wobbled in an ungainly manner from left to right, trying to find its centre of gravity, then it ascended vertically, languidly, above the doors of what were plainly aircraft hangars. Soon it passed off the monitors, leaving only the ghostly image of the aircraft hangars, beyond which was a barbedwire fence and a vast stretch of desert.

‘That wasn’t one of our saucers,’ Wilson said. ‘Is that the White Sands Proving Ground?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘So what’s so unusual about this transmission? We’ve managed to project to there before.’

‘I didn’t programme Clarke to telepathically leap to that area. I programmed him to track one of our own saucer flights – which you saw – and then he tuned in by himself to that new image – or, to be more precise, someone else tuned in to *him*.’

‘So where are the images coming from?’

‘Please observe. I’m going to key in a non-verbal request to Clarke, to identify the source of his present images. Though unable to speak, he can show you on the screens just what’s going on.’

Tugarinov tapped his request into the computer keyboard, then stepped back and waited. After what seemed like a long time, but was actually less than a minute, a murky image of a city skyline appeared on the monitor screens.

‘I recognise it,’ Wilson said. ‘Portland, Maine.’

Once Wilson had identified the location, Tugarinov tapped it into the computer to let the cyborg, Clarke, know that they had received the information. When he had done so, the image changed to an apartment block in the same city, then this dissolved to the inside of an apartment in the same building. A middle-aged woman with black hair and a look of pain on her face was tossing and turning on her bed. There were tablets on her bedside cabinet and she appeared to be having a migraine.

‘She’s in a telepathic trance,’ Wilson said.

‘Yes. And she’s obviously suffering severe stress. Which suggests that she’s tuned in accidentally to someone else, somewhere else. We have to find out who and where that source is.’

Tugarinov keyed another request into the keyboard and then watched as Marlon Clarke’s eyes, framed between the metal band of the stereotaxic

skullcap and the top of the lower-face prosthetic, turned left and right, desperately searching for something, then rolled upwards and went out of focus again, like the eyes of someone lost in their own thoughts.
On the monitor screens above, the woman from Maine gradually faded out and was replaced by a repeat of the crude flying saucer ascending above the aircraft hangars of what was clearly a US Air Force or Navy aeronautical establishment in the arid wastelands of the White Sands Proving Ground.
‘Back where we started,’ Wilson said impatiently.
‘No. Wait.’ Tugarinov tapped a few more instructions into the computer keyboard. ‘He’ll now find the source for us.’
In less than a minute, the aircraft hangars dissolved and were replaced by the exterior of a clapboard building that had barbed-wire fences beyond it and was guarded by US Army Air Force soldiers. A closer image of the same building showed signs clearly marked ‘US Army Air Force’ and ‘Top Secret’. Those signs dissolved to make way for an image of a man wearing army dungarees sitting on a chair in a booth, wearing earphones and either writing notes or drawing sketches of what he was seeing.
The telepathic communication was not sharp or close enough to reveal what those drawings showed, but Wilson had no doubts at all.
‘That man is an ESP-trained soldier tuning into the US-Canadian flying saucer we just saw taking off from the White Sands Proving Ground. As that building, also, is in the White Sands Proving Ground, he obviously can’t transmit that far yet and is practicing on reasonable local subjects. The woman from Portland, Maine, is obviously a psychic who tuned in accidentally to him, just as our cyborg tuned into her thoughts, confusing the US-Canadian saucer for the one he was tracking – namely, our own.’
‘The accident doesn’t matter,’ Tugarinov said. ‘What matters is that the Americans, like my Russian friends in the Parapsychology Laboratory in the University of Leningrad, are now experimenting with ESP.’
‘Correct,’ Wilson said. ‘They thought they could keep it secret, but there are no secrets any more. I think my American friends might need another hard lesson, so keep monitoring that woman from Portland, Maine.’
‘Yes, sir,’ Tugarinov said.
Wilson glanced briefly at the hideous, surgically mutated head of the former Marlon Clarke, then nodded approvingly at Dr Tugarinov and left the laboratory.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

For the first six months of 1959 Dwight commuted on a regular basis between Dayton, Ohio, and Washington DC, investigating UFO sightings in the former and personally delivering his reports to Dr Frederick Epstein's Aerial Phenomena Investigations Institute in the latter. As Beth had anticipated, the frequent trips to the Capital were a welcome break from the previous monotony of his life in Dayton and rendered even more appealing because they offered him frequent contact with Bob and Thelma Jackson, both resident in Greenbelt, Maryland, where Bob had gone to work after leaving the Air Force and before joining the APII. When not at the APII, Dwight had many a good lunch or evening with Bob and Thelma, who had lost neither their good humour nor their warmth.

Returning to the investigation of UFO sightings in Dayton was indeed an experience for Dwight, not only because of his ongoing fascination with the subject and the many people he was meeting again, but even more so because of his shock at the lack of co-operation he found amongst his old friends at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. Not that there were, in truth, many old friends left there, since most had been transferred out of the ATIC even before his departure. Nevertheless, the few still working there were singularly unhelpful, claiming that the Air Force no longer had any interest in the matter and viewed civilian investigators as a nuisance.

Apart from those who worked for Dr Epstein's APII, the other reliable civilian investigators came from the many different UFO organisations now scattered widely across the whole country. The most notable of these was the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), founded in 1956, headed by former Marine Corps Major Donald Keyhoe, and also located in Washington DC. Though these two major Washington DC organisations frequently were in competition with one another, it was from the NICAP that Dwight had gained a lot of the mainly young, sometimes eccentric, but always lively UFO investigators who had made his life more interesting during the past six months.

They had a language all their own, being fond of the use of acronyms such as CE1 (Close Encounters of the First Kind), phenomena that cause a transient effect on the witness, such as time loss or radio interference; CE2 (Close Encounters of the Second Kind), phenomena that cause effects that are semi-permanent and observable by those who did *not* share the experience; CE3 (Close Encounters of the Third Kind), phenomena that include animate entities such as extraterrestrials or robotic crew members;

and CE4 (Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind), events that cause the witness, or witnesses, to have unnatural or seemingly impossible experiences, such as psychic interaction, levitation and paralysis, or which affect the witness, mentally or physically, for a long time after the event occurs.

Spouting such scientific-sounding phrases and armed with survey maps, binoculars, theodolites, tape recorders, cameras, notebooks, drawing pads, pencils and pens, these enthusiasts swarmed across the country, most to desolate wastelands such as those in New Mexico and Arizona, to visit the site of a UFO sighting and take measurements and photos; interview witnesses, cajoling written statements and sketches from them; contact weather centres to check for temperature inversions or other atmospheric phenomena that could be misinterpreted as UFOs; check local civilian and military airports for information regarding general air traffic and weather balloon launches; and approach local police stations for facts regarding related sightings or witnesses not already interviewed. Considered by many, especially those in positions of authority, to be a great nuisance, they did in fact turn many a UFO (Unidentified Flying Object) into an IFO (Identified Flying Object) while also supplying invaluable written and visual material to the major civilian UFO organisations.

Apart from their contribution to the APII, Dwight enjoyed meeting them because so many of them were young, optimistic and enthusiastic in a manner that was both contagious and encouraging. He needed the encouragement because Beth had told him about her inexplicable blackout and CE1 experience on the road opposite the garage where Dwight had once worked – and where the new owner, Frank Bancroft, had experienced something so terrifying that it had caused him to die of a heart attack. Beth's story had only reinforced Dwight's belief that he – and perhaps other UFOlogists – were being watched and were also, almost certainly, in constant danger.

While Dwight's brief with the APII was restricted solely to an investigation of UFO sightings as potential extraterrestrial visitations, he was also secretly keeping his eyes and ears open for any further information on the possibility that they, or other UFOs, were man-made.

This possibility had obsessed him ever since his old friend, US Air Force Captain Andrew 'Andy' Boyle, had told him about spherical-or-disc-shaped experimental aircraft, notably the Avrocar constructed at the A. V. Roe

Aircraft Company in Malton, Ontario. Though reportedly this man-made ‘flying saucer’ had failed to fly with any great degree of efficiency, the fact that its existence had been officially denied until it was photographed on the ground by a press photographer lent some credibility to the notion that the same project, or similar projects, but of a much more advanced kind, were still being undertaken, either in Canada or in the top-secret military research establishments of the White Sands Proving Ground, New Mexico.

As long as he lived, Dwight would not forget his experience with the men in black in that motel on the outskirts of Albuquerque in 1954, five years ago – the event that had finally made him decide to leave the Air Force for good. The description given by Andy Boyle of the dome-shaped ‘aircraft’ he had seen landing outside a secret hangar at Cannon Air Force Base was also an indelible memory for Dwight, since the ‘aircraft’ as described by Andy was almost certainly a flying saucer: its fuselage formed by two plates, one placed upside down on the other, with a raised Perspex dome in the middle – obviously the pilot’s cabin – and circular, gyroscopically balanced plates revolving around it. Whether extraterrestrial or man-made, that flying saucer had undoubtedly been kept for an indeterminate period in that heavily guarded hangar at Cannon AFB.

Later, after his terrifying experience with what may have been a flying saucer hovering outside his motel window, followed by a frightening encounter with a group of men dressed all in black, who had threatened him and stolen Andy’s invaluable UFO photo, Dwight had tried to contact Andy again to find out if he’d had a similar experience. First he learnt that Andy had been transferred to Alaska with hardly any notice at all. A week later, he learnt that Andy had died in an unexplained helicopter crash over Mt McKinley. Neither his body nor that of the pilot had been found.

From that moment on, Dwight had been haunted by Andy’s contention that the flying saucers could indeed be man-made. It was not a hypothesis he had dared to raise so far with Dr Frederick Epstein at the APII, since he had not come across any supportive evidence for what Andy had told him before his untimely death. He had, nevertheless, asked one of his NICAP researchers, Tony Scaduto, to bring him anything he happened to find along those lines. Now, he was on his way to meet Scaduto in a bar in Georgetown, to hear what he had sworn on the phone was a fascinating story relating to man-made flying saucers.

Dwight and Scaduto met in an Irish pub in Connecticut Avenue. Downstairs the bar was packed with drunken marines from Quantico; upstairs, where Dwight and Scaduto met, it was even more packed, but with a mixed crowd joining in the songs being played by a four-piece Irish band - autoharp, fiddle, flatpick guitar, mandolin – while turning red-faced from Guinness stout, Harp on tap, and dangerously large whiskey chasers. Tony was a twenty-five-year-old Brooklyn boy, still single, who loved rock 'n' roll music and dressed like Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*. A goodnatured, fun-loving young man, he was also bright, if potentially self-destructive when it came to drinking, smoking and women.

'This is a good place to meet for a talk,' Dwight informed him, glancing at the energetic, noisy Irish band. 'I can hardly hear myself speak.'

'They go off in a minute,' Scaduto said. 'Then we can have a proper talk. Meanwhile, what's your poison?'

'I haven't been in an Irish pub for years, so make it a pint of Guinness. Anyway,' he added, after Scaduto had ordered his drink and another for himself, 'I thought you were a rock 'n' roll fan – not a fan of *this* kind of music.'

'This is the year the music died,' Tony replied laconically. 'Buddy Holly, the Big Bopper and Richie Valens – all killed in a plane crash. Meanwhile, Elvis, *sans* sideburns, is serving out his time with the goddamned US Army in West Germany, leaving us with Pat Boone, Frankie Avalon, Bobby Rydell and all the other pukemaking mother's boys. No wonder I'm listening to Irish music! It's all we've got left.'

Eventually, just as the barman brought them two more pint glasses of Guinness, the band on the stage took a break to enthusiastic applause.

'They'll be off-stage for about half-an-hour,' Scaduto told Dwight. 'That should be enough time for our discussion.'

'So what's this fascinating story you have for me?'

'Pretty bizarre, to put it mildly,' Scaduto replied, 'so I couldn't resist it.'

'Stop teasing,' Dwight told him.

Scaduto grinned, sipped some Guinness, then wiped foam from his lips with the back of his band. 'I picked this story up from one of my informants: a civilian secretary at the Office of Naval Intelligence.'

'Sounds well placed,' Dwight said.

'She's often well placed in my bed,' Scaduto said, grinning. 'Anyway, according to my lady friend – a great lay, incidentally – a woman psychic in

Portland, Maine, recently informed the CIA that she'd had telepathic contact with extraterrestrials in what she thought was a space-ship.'
'A crank,' Dwight said, unable to hide his disappointment.
'Not necessarily – though that's exactly what the CIA thought at first. Since to them it seemed like a classic scam – a woman, a supposed psychic, using automatic handwriting for communication with extraterrestrials – the CIA gave it a miss. However, the Canadian government got their hands on the CIA report and, instead of dismissing it, which seemed the logical thing to do, they sent their leading UFOlogist, accompanied by a government-trained hypnotist, to interview her where she lived in Portland. According to the UFOlogist, the woman, in a hypnotic trance, correctly answered highly complex questions about space flight, about which she had formerly known dip-shit.'
Scaduto had another sip of his Guinness and glanced at the women scattered around the bar as he licked the foam from his lips.
'Not surprisingly,' he continued eventually, 'when the US Navy learned about this, they sent two intelligence officers to talk to the same woman. During the subsequent interrogation, one of the Navy intelligence officers, who had, please note, *been trained in ESP*, tried to tune in to the woman's contactee. When this experiment failed, he and his colleague returned to Washington DC and informed the CIA at Langley, Virginia.'
Though the Irish band had stopped playing, a few of the older patrons of this generally youth-orientated pub, their faces flushed with drink, began rocking from side to side while tearfully singing, 'I'll take you home again, Kathleen.'
'Someone should take *them* home,' Scaduto said as he glanced at them and then turned back to Dwight. 'So, where was I?'
'When the ESP-trained Navy intelligence officer failed to make contact with the woman's contactee, he and his friend returned to report their failure to the CIA at Langley. So how did the CIA react?'
'Well, instead of expressing their disappointment, the CIA – possibly impressed because Navy intelligence had gone to so much trouble for a case that they, the CIA, had ignored – displayed more interest than before, In fact, they arranged for the ESPtrained intelligence officer to try making contact from CIA headquarters, right there at Langley Field, Virginia. Six witnesses – two of them CIA employees, one of whom was agent Jack Fuller, the others from the Office of Naval Intelligence - got together in the office in

Langley to observe the results of the experiment.'
Trying to ignore the tuneless singing of the maudlin drunkards nearby, Dwight, becoming intrigued despite his initial scepticism, leaned closer to Scaduto and asked, 'Well?'
'This time, when the ESP-trained intelligence officer went into his hypnotic trance, he made contact with *someone*.'
'Was the identity and whereabouts of that someone made known?'
'Not at first. When the intelligence officer, in his trance condition, was asked if he was in contact with ordinary men, spirit beings or extraterrestrials, he said it was the latter. When one of the men in the room then demanded some kind of proof for this assertion, the intelligence officer, still in his hypnotic trance, said that if they looked out the window they would see a flying saucer high in the sky over the Capitol building. When the men went to the window and looked out, that's just what they saw: a large flying saucer hovering silently in the sky, approximately over Capitol Hill.'
'Did they have the sense to try for confirmation of their sighting?'
'Surprisingly, they did. A quick phone call from one of the CIA officers – almost certainly Fuller – to Washington National Airport, established that at that very moment the radar centre there was reporting that its radar returns were being blacked out in the direction of the sighting over Capitol Hill.'
Dwight gave a low whistle. 'So what happened then?'
'The operator at Washington National Airport had no sooner finished complaining about his blacked-out radar returns when the flying saucer shot up vertically and disappeared – reportedly as quickly as a light bulb blinking out.'
'What was the saucer like?'
Scaduto shrugged, sipped some more Guinness, then placed his glass back on the counter. 'That's the problem,' he said. 'No description of the flying saucer was released. A lid was slammed on the whole thing.'
Dwight shook his head in despair. 'Damn!' he exclaimed, lowering his head. Then he looked up again. 'So how did your friend, the great lay, come to hear the story?'
'Good one.' Scaduto grinned from ear to ear. 'Major Robert J. Friend, present head of the increasingly impotent Project Blue Book, was informed of the events of that day by the CIA and promptly arranged for Duke University's parapsychology lab to investigate both the psychic from Maine and the ESP-trained intelligence officer. That investigation led to the

mistaken declassification of the original reports – and those reports eventually passed through the Office of Naval Intelligence, thus through my friend's hands.'
'Then on to you.'
'Right. When we were sharing her warm bed.'
'She didn't give you the original reports?'
'No, of course not!' Scaduto pretended to be affronted, before grinning again. 'She just lovingly whispered the info into my ear.'
'Before sticking her tongue in it, no doubt.'
'A gentleman never tells.'
Dwight grinned and nodded. 'So what were the results of the Duke University investigations?'
'God knows. Their report never materialised, Project Blue Book released no analysis of the sighting report, the government did nothing about the unexplained Washington DC radar blackout, and the origin of the flying saucer seen over Capitol Hill remains a secret to this day. As for the men present at the hypnotic trance session in that room in Langley, the CIA took *punitive* action against them by transferring them to other positions – with the single exception of CIA agent Jack Fuller.'
'So why didn't you ask Fuller what happened?'
Scaduto grinned and tapped the side of his nose with his index finger. 'I did. He denied any involvement in such a matter, then laughed and cut me off.'
'He's a sharp bastard, that Fuller. Sharp and hard.'
'He is that, sure enough,' Scaduto said, automatically influenced by the pub and sounding rather Irish.
Dwight had another sip of his drink, licked his lips, then gazed down thoughtfully at his glass. 'A nice little story,' he said, 'but it seems too far-fetched to be true.'
'It may seem that way to you,' Scaduto responded without pause, 'but the incident
– or something very like it – must have taken place, because Major Friend later wrote about the whole business in an official Memorandum for the Record. That Memorandum has since been filed in the Air Force Archives at Maxwell AFB, Montgomery, Alabama – but it wasn't filed until a copy found its way into the hands of a few UFOlogists. The Memorandum is genuine – either that, or Major Friend, the present head of Project Blue Book, is submitting fiction in his official reports.'

Dwight nodded affirmatively, acknowledging this undeniable truth. ‘So just what are you trying to tell me, Tony?’
‘You want another Guinness?’
‘No. I’m catching a plane back to Dayton when I leave here. Home sober when greeted by wife and daughter, then sit down, respectably sober, to dinner.’
‘Yeah, I get the picture.’ Only twenty-five years old, still single, and filled with sexual vitality, Scaduto glanced sideways, to where an attractive, raven-haired girl in tight blue jeans and sweater was studying him slyly in the mirror angled over the bar. More wily than she would realise until it was too late, he had ascertained her interest and was about to move in on her.
‘Okay,’ he said. ‘Before I offer that little sweetheart a drink or two, I’ll tell you exactly what I think.’ He smiled at the girl, then lowered his gaze as if shy, though in fact he was concentrating again on Dwight. ‘I’ve always been intrigued,’ he said, ‘by the unusual amount of official interest paid to the so-called Woman from Maine – a civilian female with supposed telepathic abilities. I am, however, wise to the fact that both the Russian secret police – the KGB – and the CIA have, for years, been investigating the espionage potential of mental telepathy, psychic photography, and other forms of parapsychology. So I’m naturally starting to wonder if there could be any connection between that fact and the Woman from Maine.’
‘What kind of connection?’
‘Since communication by mental telepathy has already been attained with some degree of success in Soviet *and* American laboratories, and between submarine and land bases, it’s possible that the CIA was genuinely concerned with that technologically-ignorant woman’s inexplicable knowledge of the more complex details of space flight. As the CIA is interested in the espionage potential of telepathy, it stands to reason that they’d have certain men trained in ESP and would send one to attend the trance session. If we then accept that telepathic communication was made with *someone* in that office in CIA headquarters, Langley, Virginia, and that the agent in a trance, if not actually making that UFO materialise, had at least been informed telepathically of its existence, it then seems possible that the Woman from Maine had been in contact with a telepathically-trained US *government* employee, albeit by accident.’
‘Are you suggesting that the UFO seen over Capitol Hill was a *US government* flying saucer?’

‘Yes,’ Scaduto said.
‘Man-made?’
‘Exactly. The more I look into these damned things, the more I’m convinced that the White House, the Pentagon, and certainly Army, Navy and Air Force intelligence of the White Sands Proving Ground and other top-secret areas, are deliberately causing confusion, doubt and fear regarding UFO sightings because they’re protecting their own. While the more technically advanced saucers might indeed be extraterrestrial, I think the US Army, Navy or Airforce also have their own models. I don’t know for sure – but I believe so.’
‘Have you raised that belief with Dr Epstein or anyone else at APII?’
‘No. This theory goes completely against the grain of most of the UFO organisations, including APII and NICAP, so I’m keeping my big mouth shut for now. You’re the first person in the business who’s told me he’s interested in the same possibility, so that’s why I’ve told you this.’
‘And you’re still interested?’
‘Damned right I am.’
‘It could be a dangerous thing to pursue,’ Dwight told him.
‘I don’t scare easily.’ Scaduto retorted, then he turned his head to smile deliberately, invitingly, at the raven-haired girl farther along the bar. She crossed her shapely legs and returned Scaduto’s winning smile.
‘You’re in like Flynn,’ Dwight told him, slipping off the barstool and taking his overnight bag in his hand. ‘If you come across anything else, please give me a call.’
‘I will,’ Scaduto promised, already slipping off his stool to make his move on the girl still smiling at him.
‘Meanwhile, try to stay out of trouble, Tony.’
‘The only trouble I’m going to get into,’ Scaduto said, ‘will be found between that sweetheart’s legs.’
Dwight sighed, recalling the days of his own youth. Then he left the bar.

Chapter Thirty

The biggest flying saucer to date, the *Goddard*, named after Wilson’s only hero, the American rocket genius Robert H. Goddard, was known as the ‘mother ship’ because it was 350 foot in diameter, 150 foot high at the central point between dome and base, built in three layers, and carried not only a crew of over fifty men, but also the smaller manned saucers, those the size of the original *Kugelblitz*, the even smaller, three foot to twelve foot

diameter, unmanned, remote-controlled probes, and a variety of large and small CAMS either piloted by small, surgically mutated Ache Indian cyborgs, remote controlled from the mother ship, or programmed to react robotically to certain stimuli for the exploration of the sea bed. Technologically even more advanced than its predecessor, *Kugelblitz III*, the gigantic *Goddard* was powered by a highly advanced electromagnetic propulsion system that ionised the surrounding air or sea, an electromagnetic damping system that aided the craft's lift and hovering capabilities, and bodywork composed of an electrically charged magnesium orthosilicate so minutely porous that it managed to be waterproof while ensuring, when airborne, an absolute minimum of friction, heat and drag.

It was Wilson's intention to have even bigger 'mother ships' for sea-bed exploration and flights in outer space, but at the moment this 350-foot craft, submerged deep in the Sargasso Sea between Florida and Bermuda, was the best he could manage for the most ambitious series of underwater experiments he had so far attempted. These included the capturing of marine beasts and fish never before seen by man, a general exploration of the sea-bed and the collection of samples from it, the abduction of crew members of boats afloat in the area known as the Bermuda Triangle, and, in two instances, the capture of whole motorboats, complete with their terrified passengers.

'A truly great achievement,' Vance Whitaker, the new Flight Captain of the mother-ship, said as he gazed through the viewing window – he was standing between Wilson and Sea Captain Ritter Dietrich – at the artificially and naturally illuminated wonders of the deep, including all kinds of plankton, bizarre fish, and other creatures never before seen by man and either remarkably beautiful or, by human standards, hideous. 'Absolutely magnificent!'

Wilson did not bother explaining to the chemically 'indoctrinated' former NASA astronaut that the colony's great advances in submersible technology had only been made possible because of the many undersea prototypes tried out in Antarctica with living crewmembers, none of whom had volunteered, many of whom had lost their lives when the prototypes leaked in the ice-covered sea or broke up underwater. *Goddard*, however, was the superb result of those experiments and could be used either under the water or in the stratosphere. For this reason it had a Sea Captain, Ritter Dietrich, for undersea voyages, as well as a Flight Captain, Vance Whitaker,

for atmospheric and stratospheric flight. As the last pilot, another abducted USAF officer, had never managed to learn the complexities of stratospheric flight, he had recently been terminated and replaced by this new man, Whitaker, who, the previous month, had supposedly crashed in the sea near the Bahamas, 360 miles from Cape Canaveral, during a fifteen-minute sub-orbital test flight of NASA's new Mercury spacecraft.

The three men were standing at one of the many windows of the control room, which had about a dozen reinforced viewing windows around its circular wall and a dome-shaped ceiling of heat-resistant, reinforced Perspex over which was what resembled a great umbrella of seamless steel, though it was actually minutely porous magnesium orthosilicate, like the rest of the hull. The dome-shaped steel covering of the Perspex ceiling – seen from outside as the central dome of the flying saucer – was divided almost invisibly into two concave sections that could slide apart in opposite directions and curved back down into the floor, thus giving the crew members a 360° view from any part of the flight deck.

The latter was composed of what looked like the standard hardware for a normal airliner, including switch panels, pitch-trim controls, autopilot engage switch, inertial navigation, navigational radio selector, weather radar, radio equipment, intercom switches, an unknown brand of ADF (automatic direction finder), computer selection switches, and an unusually small but exceptionally powerful computer that controlled most of the flight-deck functions and could be activated by an electronic 'voice' composed of minute vibrations transmitted at varying speeds and frequencies.

Such orders were conveyed by the small Ache cyborgs who, though having had their vocal cords severed as part of their lower-face surgery, including the removal of the nose, mouth and jaw, communicated electronically from their metal prosthetics to the electronic-voice activated computer. Instructions to the cyborgs were communicated via a pinhead microphone strapped to the throat of a human superior, such as Sea Captain Dietrich or Flight Captain Whitaker, and activated by an on/off switch built into his international date-time wristwatch. As Flight Captain Whitaker had already learned, the flight deck did *not* contain such standard aircraft controls as thruster reverse light, nose gear tiller, speed brake handle, or even brake pressure or aileron and rudder trims, as these were not required for the unique propulsion system of the *Goddard*.

Dubbed the ‘mother ship’ because it was actually a carrying ship, the *Goddard* used its wide variety of large and small CAMS to pick up exotic marine life, lost treasure from ancient sea wrecks, and a wealth of normally unavailable minerals from the ocean-bed and from Earth – notably, in the latter case, the bodily parts of animals, which were required for the continuing medical experiments in the Antarctic colony.

The Goddard could also release, and receive, highly advanced versions of the original *Feuerballs*, the latest models being used mainly as spy-satellites and radarblocking devices, but with the added capability of laser-beam technology that could make the engines of automobiles and aircraft malfunction, as well as stunning or hypnotising human beings.

Looking at the battery-charged lights beaming out through the murk of the ocean, revealing ever more as the great craft surfaced, Flight Captain Whitaker said: ‘Aren’t you frightened that the lights, if seen by the crews or passengers of ships or aircraft, will give your presence away?’

‘No,’ Wilson replied with confidence. ‘USOS, or Unidentified Submarine Objects, are even harder to identify than UFOs because of the wide diversity of marine biology, which includes a surprising amount of phosphorescent plant and animal life. Look!’ He pointed at the window, to what appeared to be unusual plants that were drifting through and around the beams of the *Goddard’s* lights, giving off their own eerie illumination. ‘Single-celled, luminous, planktonic organisms. They glow even brighter when near the surface of the sea, being stimulated by the movement of the waves. Others, such as the *Cypridina Noctiluca*, actually *respond* automatically to beams of light, such as searchlights, by ejecting a luminous cloud in the water. Luminous crustaceans, such as copepods, some living on the water’s surface, some in the ocean depths, can be found in seas all over the world. Then, of course, you have jellyfish and other coelenterates and ctenophores, which also create patches of light in the water – some very big. So, as you can appreciate, experienced sailors or pilots who see our lights under the water aren’t likely to be too concerned. That only comes when we surface. Which, of course, we’ll be doing shortly. Come with me, Flight Captain.’

Leaving Dietrich to supervise the surfacing of the *Goddard*, Wilson led Whitaker out of the flight deck and along a curving, steel-walled, white-painted corridor (for it was, in fact, circular, running around the inner rim of the giant saucer, as did the corridors on all levels) until they came to a closed

door, which opened automatically when Wilson aimed his remote control at it. The doorway led to the top level of an immense, silvery-grey dome filled with ladders and catwalks. Below were glittering doors and platforms, modules of steel and glass, shining mazes of pipes coiled around generators, bright lights flashing off more white-painted walls. There were people down there, looking tiny and far away, climbing ladders, crossing catwalks, moving up and down that 150-foot drop in elevators constructed like steel cages.

About halfway down, fifty feet above the lowest floor, on a centrally positioned, circular-shaped, third-level platform, in the centre of the lowest, largest workshop, the smaller man-made saucer, *Kugelblitz II*, which Whitaker estimated was 150 foot in diameter, was resting on its launch pad, surrounded by four even smaller, unmanned flying-saucer probes, each about fifteen foot wide.

‘This way,’ Wilson said, leading Whitaker across the catwalk, above that dizzying drop, until they arrived at the cage-like elevator that descended through the centre of the *Goddard*, from just under the floor of the flight deck to the third-level platform. Once down there, Wilson, followed by the obedient Whitaker, advanced to the lowered ramp of the *Kugelblitz II*.

Just as they reached the smaller saucer, the *Goddard* broke the surface of the ocean, with the sea suddenly roaring and pounding as water parted around the outer steel covering of the dome and rushed down its sides. The great mother ship rocked gently for a moment as it floated in the turbulent waves created by its own surfacing, but eventually, when the sea’s surface had returned to normal, the rocking stopped and the metallic dome divided in two, forming separate concave plates that moved away from each other, then sank back out of sight, leaving only the immense dome of special heat-resistant, reinforced Perspex, through which sunlight beamed down to form a dazzling web of silvery-white striations that illuminated the gloomy interior.

Glancing upwards, Wilson and Whitaker saw the different floors more clearly, with men in grey or black coveralls hurrying across catwalks, clambering up and down ladders, or moving back and forth in the glass-panelled offices located around the curved inner wall of the mother ship.
‘What a sight!’ Whitaker whispered, clearly awe-struck.

Even as he was speaking, immense panels in a section of the wall of the mother ship slid apart like the doors of an aircraft hangar, offering a view of the vast, sunlight sky and a glimpse of the sea below.

‘The level upon which this landing pad is located,’ Wilson explained to Whitaker, ‘is approximately fifty feet above the surface of the sea. Let’s go in.’

They entered the *Kugelblitz II* by walking up the sloping ramp that would, once they were inside, be retracted to form the underside of the bottom disc. This is exactly what happened: the ramp moved back up into the loading bay on thick steel hinges, until it formed part of the wall, slotting back where it belonged with such precision that the joins around its edge could scarcely be seen and formed a perfect waterproof, airtight seal.

The loading bay was actually a space in the revolving lower disc, used only as a passageway for men and equipment; in other words, anyone, or anything, entering the loading bay from outside had to continue on until they were in the non-rotating main body of the saucer. For this reason, Wilson and Whitaker hurried through the loading bay, which could have been that of any large aircraft, and emerged to the central, non-revolving main body, which also was circular, being the bottom of the large, dome-shaped superstructure. After following the corridor around for a few more feet, they stepped into an elevator that took them up nearly fifty feet, past the engine rooms, storage rooms, barred cages for abducted people, a surgery where those abducted could be medically examined or even dissected during flight, latrines, foodstores, a small recreation room containing books, maps, and a recently invented video-TV set that could show films on tape, and, finally, into the flight deck.

For the time being the meniscus-shaped, porous-metal covering for the Perspex dome was open, giving those on the flight deck a 360° view of the interior of the mother ship, though from their position on the landing pad they could see only the third-floor level and most of what was above it. The flight deck was, at that moment, being prepared for take-off by another crew of surgically mutated and robotised Ache Indians who, being small, and with their lower-face metal prosthetics and myoelectric metal claws (actually small CAMS), looked even more frightening than they would have had they been taller.

No sooner had Wilson and Whitaker entered the flight deck than two massive plates in what had appeared to be the seamless facing wall of the mother ship slid apart and kept opening until they formed a rectangular space about the same size as the entrance to an aircraft hangar. That great space framed a sheer blue sky, the clear horizon, and a strip of green-blue

sea.
As Wilson and Whitaker strapped themselves into seats at the control panel – between the busy cyborgs whose metallic throats were giving off infrasounds that enabled them to electronically ‘talk’ to the computerised controls – the *Kugelblitz II* throbbed with that familiar bass humming sound, then vibrated slightly, swayed from side to side, and finally lifted a couple of feet off the landing pad. While it was still hovering, Wilson nodded to Flight Captain Whitaker, who, now taking command, spoke his instructions, in plain English, into the pinhead microphone strapped to his throat, as part of a communication system that included a covert ear piece for receiving. Those spoken instructions would be converted by the computer into an electronic language understood by the saucer’s control console, which would react accordingly.
Because the saucer utilised a gravity shield that came on automatically when required, its passengers needed no protection against the pull of gravity or increasing outer pressure and were only strapped into their chairs during the initial stages of take-off. Now, under Whitaker’s supervision, the hovering saucer advanced horizontally to the large opening in the sloping side of the hull, hovered again halfway across the lip of the opening, then moved outside altogether and stopped again, hovering just a few feet from the *Goddard*, but a good fifty feet above the surface of the Sargasso Sea. There, at a command from Whitaker, the meniscusshaped, metallic outer casings of the dome emerged from the floor at both sides of the flight deck and curved upwards and inward to meet at the top of the dome, forming what looked deceptively like a seamless whole. Matching windows in the lower half of the metallic casing ensured that the flight crew still had their 360° view, though they could no longer see directly above them.
As the dome was being sealed, the four fifteen-foot diameter, unmanned probes also emerged from the mother ship to surround the *Kugelblitz II* and prepare for takeoff.
Being already in the air, the five craft did not follow the usual two-stage pattern of flying saucer take-offs: a tentative, vertical rise of between fifty and a hundred feet, then a spectacular, remarkably quick blast-off, either vertically or at a sharp angle. Instead, they hovered beside the mother ship until the gravity shield had come on, then abruptly shot off to the west, heading for Florida.
Protected by the *Kugelblitz II*’s gravity shield, those inside had no need to

keep themselves strapped to their chairs. There was absolutely no sign or feeling of movement. However, as the journey from the Sargasso Sea to the Florida Keys took only a few minutes, neither Wilson nor Whitaker thought it worthwhile unbuckling his safety belt. Indeed, so fast was the saucer flying that at first, when the passengers looked straight ahead, they saw no more than what appeared to be a rapidly whipping, frantically spiralling tunnel of shimmering white light streaked with silvery-blue, a vertiginous well of brightness that gave no indication of which direction they were flying in: up, down, or straight ahead. It was, of course, the latter. Flying at a speed well beyond the sound barrier, Mach 1, over fifty miles high, on the very edge of space, they appeared to be suddenly blasted through the very sky itself, a giant envelope tearing open to reveal a vast azure sea that convulsed and turned purple, and then, just as abruptly, actually being the same sky, filled up with the dazzling radiance of a gigantic sun, even as the moon and stars also came out, clearly visible in the middle of the day, now present, with the sun, in an atmosphere so thin that even dust particles could not exist.

Seconds later, the *Kugelblitz II* and its four probes all slowed down to hovering speed, then hovered directly over Bimini, which could be seen as glowing dots on the radar screen and as it actually was on the TV monitor wired to a high-powered aerial camera. What the TV monitor showed, in fact, was a photomosaic of the western end of the Bermuda Triangle, the Gulf Stream flowing northward between Florida and the Great Bahama Bank, and, in the middle of the picture, Bimini itself, here in monochrome, but in actuality a ravishing tapestry of green and blue streaked with socalled ‘white’ water, containing sulphur, strontium and lithium, which often made it glow eerily.

‘Send the probes down,’ Wilson ordered into his throat microphone.

Within seconds, the four unmanned ‘probe’ saucers had flown out horizontally in the four directions of the compass, stopped abruptly, hovered briefly, then shot down towards the sea off Bimini, moving so fast that they looked like no more than tiny lights, then disappearing completely as they plunged into the water and descended, still fully operational, to the sea-bed. There, under robotic control and with the use of their CAMS, they would explore and collect samples of rock, stone, soil, plants and plankton from what might be the remains of the cyclopean walls, truncated pyramids, carved pillars, causeways and stone circles of a lost civilisation, possibly

Atlantis. While Wilson was not yet ready to embrace this theory, his encyclopaedic knowledge of ancient history impelled him to explore the possibilities and see what could be learnt from them. This was the job of the four small ‘probe’ saucers that were almost certainly, right now, extending their crab-like metallic claws to start picking up items from the sea-bed between Bimini and Andros.

‘So,’ he said when the probes had disappeared into the sea, ‘let’s head for Cocoa Beach.’

When the relevant instructions had been transmitted, the saucer ascended vertically about fifty feet, then shot off in a blur of speed towards Miami. With its gravitational shield also functioning as an inertial shield, the mass of the UFO with regard to gravity was reduced to a minute fraction of its former value, permitting exceptional buoyancy in the atmosphere, extremely high accelerations (so fast, indeed, that the human eye could not see the saucer’s take-off and would imagine that it had abruptly disappeared) and the capability of coming to a remarkably fast stop or going into abrupt, right-angle turns without harming those inside, they also being protected by the gravity shield.

Now on programmed autopilot, the saucer knew where it had go. Upon approaching the mainland, it suddenly stopped, made an abrupt turn, and then shot off in a northerly direction, automatically following the topography of the land by means of a control system that bounced radar-like signals off the ground and back to the saucer for instant computer analysis and constantly changing flight directions. Because of this, as well as the weakening and strengthening of the gravitational pull of Earth when the saucer dropped low enough, the saucer appeared to be bobbing repeatedly as it sped on its horizontal flight path towards Cocoa Beach.

It stopped abruptly and precisely over the prearranged meeting place in a field in a protected area just outside Patrick Air Force Base, two miles from the village of Greater Cocoa Beach and Cape Canaveral, the swamp-land from which dozens of Atlas, Thor, Titan and Snark missiles, as well as America’s first Earth satellite, *Explorer 1*, had been launched.

As the *Kugelblitz II* hovered high above the normal civilian and Air Force flight paths, waiting for the fall of darkness, Wilson and Whitaker partook of a light meal – the usual fruit-and-nut cereal, with a glass of dry, white wine – while discussing the many changes that had taken place down there on the east coast of Florida, where Whitaker had also trained and flown as a

budding astronaut, before being abducted by Wilson.
‘When I first went there,’ Whitaker said, ‘about seven years ago, Cocoa Beach consisted of a couple of dozen families strewn amongst the sand dunes and palmettos. Strangers rarely turned up and the villagers did little other than fish for their food and swim for their leisure. Now it’s called Greater Cocoa Beach, which includes the original village and its environs, and it has a population of approximately ten thousand souls, including astronauts, aircraft pilots, scientists, rocket engineers, ballistics experts, and a local community obsessed with making money out of the space race. Some amazing things are happening down there.’
‘Only amazing relative to the accomplishments of the rest of the West,’ Wilson noted. ‘Only amazing because of what we *let* them do. But we’re now so many years ahead of them, they’ll never catch up with us.’
‘Jack Fuller thinks differently,’ Whitaker said. ‘And that man’s no fool.’
‘He’s not a scientist, either, Flight Captain. That’s his major weakness. His others are vanity, material greed and excessive patriotism, all of which can be used against him, if and when necessary. We’ve no cause for concern there.’
Feeling nervous, as he always did when outside the Antarctic colony, this being part of the chemical ‘indoctrination’ process undergone upon his arrival, Whitaker checked his wristwatch. ‘Maybe we should have arranged the meeting somewhere in Cape Canaveral,’ he said. ‘It’s now a restricted military zone of about fifteen thousand acres, including a lot of uncleared jungle. We might have been more secure there.’
‘Or we might have been eaten by a puma,’ Wilson retorted, knowing that those animals still roamed wild there. ‘Besides, these days the Cape is crawling with tourists – even around the restricted zone, which they try to spy upon with binoculars and cameras. Also, most of the military personnel in that zone still don’t know about us, so they could prove to be troublesome.’
‘What about the personnel of Patrick AFB?’
‘The US-Canadian saucers are tested there,’ Wilson explained, ‘and kept hidden in hangars in a heavily guarded, top secret area – pretty much like Wright-Patterson’s legendary Hangar 18. For this reason we trade with them and deal only with those on the base who’ve been told about us.’
‘Like that CIA agent, Jack Fuller.’
Wilson smiled bleakly. ‘Jack Fuller trades all over the place – where we go,

he goes. So, yes, like Jack Fuller.' Glancing through the curved viewing window at the other side of the flight deck console, he saw that the sun now looked like blood pouring along the great bowl of the silvery horizon. 'The sun's setting, so they should be there by now. Complete the descent.'

Instantly, the *Kugelblitz II* started vibrating, wobbled a little, then, with its circular 'wings' rotating and their flashing lights forming a kaleidoscope, it steadied and descended vertically, first through the civilian and military flight paths, its radar constantly checking for approaching aircraft, then through the clouds, and finally all the way down to the circle of lights that marked the LZ, the landing zone, in the middle of a broad field that was encircled by electrified barbed-wire fences and further guarded by a large contingent of well-armed US Marines, spread equidistant around the perimeter.

Mere feet above the ground, whipping up dust, loose soil and leaves, the flying saucer bobbed a little and swayed gently as its hydraulic legs emerged obliquely from its convex base to dig into the ground. The bass humming sound faded away, the flashing lights blinked out in sequence, and then the saucer came to rest and was still.

Silence reigned.

Beyond the circle of upward-facing marker lamps in which the flying saucer had landed, nothing was visible except that broad, dark field and the starry sky above it. Neither the electrified barbed-wire fence nor the Marines positioned around the perimeter were visible. For a while the saucer just sat there like a massive, silverygrey mushroom, making no movement, producing no sound at all; eventually, however, the sound of a coughing engine broke the silence and a US Army jeep materialised out of the darkness to stop just outside the circle of marker lamps. The jeep's ignition was turned off, then its lights were extinguished, thus plunging it back into the darkness just outside the illuminated LZ.

In that darkness, Jack Fuller, wearing a light-grey suit with shirt and tie, clambered out of the jeep, followed by two Marines armed with 0.3-inch M1 semi-automatic rifles and carrying spare thirty-round detachable box magazines on their webbed belts. After staring thoughtfully at the flying saucer, Fuller nodded at the two soldiers, indicating that they should follow him at a reasonable distance. As they spread out behind him, he stepped between two of the marker lamps and walked slowly, carefully, towards the flying saucer.

Even as he was approaching the nearest edge of that immense, silvery-grey discus, a bass humming sound emanated from it and the top of a large plate, which before had formed part of the apparently seamless outer surface, moved away from the lower body, opening just enough to let out a long, thin blade of subdued whitish light. The top of the plate kept moving away from the wall, swivelling on hinges along its bottom end, falling backwards all the way to the ground, until it formed a wide ramp, eerily illuminated by the pale light pouring out from the loading bay of the saucer.

Three figures were silhouetted in that deliberately reduced lighting: a tall, slim man with two child-sized, oddly shaped creatures whose features could not immediately be defined. Only when Fuller had stopped near to where the ramp met the ground did he recognise the three figures as Wilson and two unfortunate Ache Indians, who had been surgically mutated to be fitted with metal prosthetics, including the replacement of the lower face and hands, thus turning them into robotic cyborgs, half man, half machine. What remained of their original faces was rendered even more visually dreadful by the fact that the only remotely human aspects to them were the oddly glassy eyes that turned this way and that, between the metal band of a studded stereotaxic skullcap and the metal nose of a prosthetic that had replaced the lower half of the face, including the mouth, jawbone and throat. Even Fuller, who took certain horrors for granted, shuddered when he saw those pitiful, yet terrifying, creatures.

No wonder UFO contactees keep babbling about alien beings, he thought. What else could they possibly think, seeing creatures like these?

The cyborgs stood well apart and a little distance behind Wilson as the latter walked away from the ramp, to stop directly in front of Fuller. Glancing at Fuller's two armed Marines, he said, 'You know that bringing these men here is a waste of time. If you displease me, or in any way turn against me, they won't be able to help you.'

Fuller glanced at the two child-sized cyborgs standing behind Wilson and saw that they were holding what appeared to be stun guns in their myoelectric metal hands.

'Laser weapons?' he asked.

'What a bright boy you are, Fuller.'

'I like to keep up to date. So what do you want this time, Wilson?'

'Are you still here on behalf of President Eisenhower?'

'Yeah, right.'

‘Why doesn’t he send someone who has more authority. Why does he always send you?’
‘Because, as you’ve doubtless noticed before, when dealing with the likes of generals Vandenberg and Samford, I’m a lot less antagonistic to you than men of a military mind-set.’
‘You’re antagonistic, all right. You just don’t show it as openly.’
‘That may be true, but the President still thinks it’s best to keep the military out of this as much as possible. Also, he believes that if the wrong person finds out that the top brass of the White House and Pentagon are negotiating secretly with the likes of you, public outrage could lead to the fall of the whole government, including himself. Me, on the other hand... Well, I’m small fry and can be made to carry the can if we’re found out. I’m not sure that’s true at all, but that’s what he believes.’
‘You’re not sure, but you know it’s possible.’
‘Right.’
‘And you’re willing to be sacrificed this way?’
‘I love my country,’ Fuller said.
‘You’re a fool.’
‘So Fuller’s a fool. What the hell? Now what do you want?’
For a moment it seemed that Wilson might actually display anger, but he simply stared steadily at Fuller, as if trying to read him. Obviously believing he had done so, he smiled bleakly and said, ‘As best I recall, when last you met my request for massproduced components and other items, it left me owing you something.’
‘True enough. So you’ve come to pay off your debt to the US government?’
Again Wilson refused to rise to the bait by showing anger over Fuller’s bland mockery. Instead, he just said, ‘Yes.’
‘So what are you offering? Obviously not more scientific information. If so, I wouldn’t be here alone; you’d have asked for someone who could properly assess such information – not a scientific dumbhead like me. No, it must be to do with something else... Something to do with intelligence.’
‘You’re a fool, but you don’t lack common sense. That’s exactly it, Fuller.’
‘So *what* is it?’
‘I note that NASA has finally named the test pilots it’s selected for its first manned space project.’
‘Yeah, right: Project Mercury.’
‘I thought I should warn you not to let NASA become too complacent.’

‘Why?’
‘Almost certainly the Soviets will succeed, this September, in landing their *Lunik 2* spacecraft on the moon.’
‘Really?’
‘Yes. Over the past two years I’ve been abducting a variety of Soviet scientists, engineers, academics and cosmonauts, to brainwash them with chemicals, take control of their minds with minute brain implants via stereotaxic skullcaps, and send them back to where they came from as my spies. Right now I have such spies in the Moscow headquarters of the Academy of Sciences, where the *Lunik 2* flight was planned; in Moscow University, where the space experiments were carried out; at the cosmodrome living quarters in East Kazakhstan, where the cosmonauts are being trained; in the airfield at Baikonur, two hundred miles north of the Aral Sea, where the launch will take place; and at the radio tracking complex at Burokane, Armenia, where the flight and moon landing will be monitored. So, yes, I know what I’m talking about. I’ve already landed on the moon – albeit in secret – but now the Soviets are about to do the same, leaving the US well behind in the space race.’
‘That could be humiliating,’ Fuller confessed.
‘Which is exactly why the Soviets are working so hard to do it.’
‘That’s an important piece of intelligence, Wilson, but not exactly repayment for that last shipment of US supplies to your base in Antarctica.’
Wilson’s smile was bleak. ‘No, I’m forced to agree with that. I do, however, bring you something else.’
Fuller glanced at the two cyborgs standing behind Wilson in the eerie, subdued lighting emanating from the holding area of the 150-foot diameter flying saucer. Wondering what they were thinking, if anything, about what had happened to them, their surgical and mental mutation, he shivered involuntarily, then glanced beyond them, to the illuminated holding bay. The light coming out of the saucers was usually dazzling, even blinding, but this light was pale, almost yellow, and not all that bright, which meant that he could actually see more than usual – and what he saw was nothing. Clearly, the holding bay was only an entrance to the main, fixed body around which the massive rings revolved.
Disappointed, he glanced back over his shoulder, first at the two armed Marine guards behind him, then beyond the wide circle of marker lamps. The light of the lamps, however, made it impossible to see as far as the

barbed-wire perimeter, where the other Marines would be standing guard, preparing to fire at the saucer, if so signalled. Still, it was no comfort to Fuller to know that Wilson was right: that if he, Fuller, said the wrong thing or made the wrong move, he wouldn't have a prayer. He'd be paralysed by a stun gun, dragged up into the saucer, and almost certainly never be seen again. It wasn't a comforting thought.

'So what's the offer?' he asked.

'You'll take this to the White House?'

Fuller sighed. 'Yes, Wilson, direct to the President. So what am I to tell him, other than what you're already told me?'

'As you probably know...' Wilson began.

'Don't tell me what I already know.'

'As you already know,' Wilson repeated, almost gritting his teeth in the first sign of anger that he had ever displayed, 'at the end of this year, in an unprecedented international agreement, a total of twelve countries, including Britain, America and the Soviet Union, will be signing a treaty stating that no country can claim any part of Antarctica as its own, and that the continent must be held as a common preserve for scientific research.'

'A noble idea,' Fuller said.

'Once the agreement is signed,' Wilson continued, ignoring Fuller's sarcasm, 'scientific and exploratory bases will be springing up all over Antarctica.'

'Which gives you a problem,' Fuller said.

'Yes.' Wilson's gaze was as icy as the continent he seemed to love. 'So in return for a guarantee that there will be no attempts to locate or capture my base and that all sightings of my flying saucers over Antarctica will be treated with ridicule or suppressed entirely – as already they are in the United States and elsewhere – I'll guarantee that America will be the first to land men on the moon.'

'Well, we'd certainly appreciate that,' Fuller said. 'But unfortunately the US can't place restrictions on the other nations signing the Antarctic agreement.'

'The US is the only nation with the capability of launching an attack on my otherwise inaccessible part of Neu Schwabenland – still known to the West as Queen Maud Land – so I'm not yet concerned with the other nations, but only with the US.'

Realising that Wilson was as genuinely concerned as his kind could be, which wasn't much, though it was at least something, Fuller felt a flicker of

pleasure, while also accepting that this trade, no matter how indecent, could not be refused. Whether or not he – or the White House or the Pentagon – liked it, they could not afford to let the Soviets be the first to land on the moon and would therefore have to accede to Wilson's demands – just as they had done so often in the past. This was truly a bitter pill to swallow.

'I'm still not sure that we can do as you ask,' Fuller lied, 'but I'll certainly present it to the President with my personal, strong recommendation.'

'Good,' Wilson replied, showing no sign of gratitude.

After a lengthy silence, in which Wilson seemed deep in thought, Fuller, losing patience, said, '*Well*? Anything else, Mr Wilson?'

'Yes, there *is* another matter. I'm concerned that a certain Professor J. Allen Hynek, well known UFOlogist and codirector of the Smithsonian Institution's satellite tracking programme, has been allowed to head an unofficial UFO advisory group recruited by Project Blue Book and including, as well as the redoubtable Hynek, an astronomer, a physicist, a psychologist, and Major Robert J. Friend, the present head of Project Blue Book and a man too co-operative with civilian UFO groups for my liking.'

'Stop worrying about Hynek and his group,' Fuller said. 'Project Blue Book is practically on its knees and its so-called advisory group is just another red herring for the increasing number of professional and amateur UFO sleuths. That advisory group, believe me, will be disbanded by the end of next year, after serving its real purpose, which is to spread so much doubt and confusion amongst the UFOlogists that most of them will give up completely and go back to playing with toy submarines in their baths.'

'And Hynek?'

'What about him? When the group sinks, he'll probably go down with it. As for Project Blue Book, while it's continued to make a strong show of examining UFO cases, it's now under pressure from above – don't look at me! – to produce a report stating that after twelve years of investigating and analysing UFO sightings, the ATIC has *no* evidence to suggest that UFOs are either space vehicles, a threat to national security, or of any scientific value whatsoever. The same report will describe the UFO programme as a costly and unproductive burden on the Air Force. Finally, it'll recommend that Project Blue Book's staff could be more constructively used on other programmes.'

'Very good, Fuller.'

'I've nothing to do with it,' Fuller lied again, though he couldn't resist a

proud grin. ‘Anyway, while that report’s being prepared, we’re still encouraging the public to think of the UFOs in terms of extraterrestrials – your men in black are widely believed to be just that. So all in all, the UFOlogists are imagining everything *except* man-made UFOs.’
‘I know you’re reluctant to take credit for this,’ Wilson said, ‘but I have to tell you it pleases me.’
‘Good. So we’re even until you next need supplies. Can I leave now, Wilson?’
‘Your detestation is all too obvious,’ Wilson said, ‘if badly misplaced. Look to your own government – the one you revere – and then tell me which one of us is truly moral.’
‘I’m not up to that, Wilson.’
‘No, I don’t suppose you are. Morals aren’t your strong point.’ Wilson glanced across the field, to where the other Marines were hidden in darkness. Though he couldn’t see them, he knew that they were there and was amused by the thought. ‘One last thing,’ he said, returning his gaze to Fuller.
‘What?’
‘Have you heard about the woman from Maine?’
‘No.’
‘Stop lying. If I know about her – and I do – you must know that I know you were involved.’
Now understanding that Wilson really *did* have eyes and ears everywhere, Fuller, badly shaken, which was rare, simply shrugged as if it was of no consequence. ‘Yeah, right, I know about her. So? *What* about her?’
‘I’ll tell you about her,’ Wilson said, suddenly sounding as angry as Fuller had ever heard him. ‘I’ve learnt from this case that the CIA, like the KGB, is heavily involved in parapsychological research, particularly the possibilities of telepathic communication with regard to spying. Before you try denying it, please let me say that regarding the woman from Maine, I can tell you that she accidentally broke into an experimental communication between a land-based, ESP-trained Naval intelligence officer and a submerged submarine. Any story to the contrary is nonsense.’
That Wilson had found this out was a truly frightening revelation to the normally fearless Fuller.
‘I can’t confirm or deny that,’ he said, knowing how lame it sounded.
Wilson shook his head from side to side, as if pitying the attempted deceptions of Fuller and his kind. ‘You’re hoping to reach our level of

achievement in this field,' he told him, 'but you're wasting your time. I know about your woman from Maine because I broke into your telepathic communication in that office in CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, and arranged for that flying saucer to hover over Capitol Hill as a demonstration of how advanced we've become telepathically. So you see, Mr Fuller, no matter how advanced you believe you're becoming, we'll always be at least one step ahead of you – just as we are with our flying saucer technology. Your men are wasting their time.'

'Maybe' Fuller responded, trying to sound more confident than he felt. 'Maybe not. You're playing a dangerous game with these trade-offs, so you just might slip up some day.'

'I don't think so,' Wilson said. 'Thank you and good night.'

Flanked by his two hideous, deadly cyborgs, he turned away without another word and marched back up the ramp, into his towering flying saucer. Knowing better than to be within that circle of marker lamps when the saucer took off, Fuller hurried away with his two armed Marines, clambered back into his jeep, and let himself be driven back to the other Marines keeping guard around the electrified barbed-wire fence. From the other side of that fence, Fuller and the soldiers looked up in awe as the flying saucer turned into a magically glowing, egg-shaped craft that had lights of different colours flashing in rapid sequence around its revolving rings. It lifted off vertically, hovered a few seconds above the ground, illuminating the surrounding darkness with its eerie whitish glow and kaleidoscopic lights, then suddenly shot up vertically, made an abrupt turn to the west, about a hundred feet high, hovered again for a moment, then shot off and dwindled rapidly, until it was no more than a glowing light the size of a diamond. That light also shrank, merging with the stars, then abruptly blinked out.

Though nothing unusual could now be seen up there, Fuller and the many men around him kept scanning the night sky.

'Jesus Christ!' one of the soldiers behind Fuller exclaimed in a stunned, disbelieving way.

'No,' Fuller responded, now staring at the sky and accepting that he might indeed be defeated. 'Jesus Christ was in the past, soldier. You've just seen the future.'

He clambered back into the jeep and told the driver to return him to the Vanguard Hotel in Cocoa Beach. He didn't anticipate getting a good night's

sleep, but at least he could be alone there.
Fuller needed a dark cave.

Chapter Thirty-One

‘I don’t scare easily,’ Scaduto told Dwight when they were having cold beers in the sweltering heat of an outdoor bar in Carillon Park, Dayton, Ohio, in July 1960. ‘But I don’t mind admitting that this business is starting to put me on edge. Particularly this latest piece of news.’

‘What news?’

‘Haven’t you heard?’ Despite the heat, Scaduto was wearing his customary blackleather jacket, blue denims and high-heeled boots. His sideburns were ink-black and prominent. ‘It was in yesterday’s newspapers. Your former Project Blue Book chief, Captain Edward J. Ruppelt, has died of an unexpected heart attack.’

Dwight was shocked to hear that. Captain Ruppelt was even younger than he was. The last time Dwight had seen him was that sad day in December 1953 when he had informed them of the dire results of the Robertson panel report and, even worse, told them that Project Blue Book was being run down and most of its staff, including Ruppelt, dispersed to other locations. It had been a sad day for all of them, but Ruppelt had at least been his relatively young, decent, healthy self. Certainly not heart attack material.

‘I don’t like it,’ Scaduto said. ‘In 1953, Ruppelt leaves the Air Force. Three years later he writes a book in which he states categorically that UFOs are for real. Three years after that, he revises the book, reversing his previous opinions and insisting that UFOs are probably natural phenomena. And approximately one year later, in 1960, weary before his time, he dies of a heart attack. It sure makes you think, doesn’t it?’

‘Yes, it does.’ In fact, this shocking piece of news had reminded Dwight not only of the many other people involved in UFO investigations who had died unexpectedly, been killed in surprising ways, or committed ‘suicide’ for no discernible reason. It had also reminded him of the many other ways in which UFO investigators had been made to suffer, including financial hardship, problems at work, sudden transfers to far-flung locations, actual threats and other forms of harassment from the mysterious ‘men in black’, and marital breakdowns based on one or other of the former. Something else not easy to forget was the fact that many UFO researchers had disappeared completely, leaving no indication of why or where they had gone. They had simply never been seen again.

Last but by no means least, the news of Ruppelt's unexpected death, added to the mysterious nature of his unexplained reversal regarding the reality of the UFO phenomenon and subsequent slide into depression and poor health after leaving the Air Force, had brutally reminded Dwight of Beth's bizarre, frightening experience eighteen months ago, when she had been driving (or so she had thought) past the garage that Dwight had worked and lived in during the years of their separation.

For months prior to the incident, Beth had been complaining that she was having bad nightmares, relating to UFOs and tormenting men in black, that she felt she was being followed, though she had never actually seen anyone following her, and that she was haunted by the general feeling that something unknown was making her constantly fretful. The day of the incident in question, when she had just dropped Dwight off at the Dayton airport for his flight to Washington DC for his first normal visit to Dr Frederick Epstein at the APII, she had imagined she was driving past the garage, taken over from Dwight by bachelor Frank Bancroft, then realised that she had actually being *staring* at it for some time through the window of her car, which was parked inexplicably by the side of the road. She then noticed that her wristwatch had stopped two hours previously – at approximately the time she would have passed the garage after leaving the airport. Yet her wristwatch was not the only item to have malfunctioned: when she tried to switch on the ignition of her car, it wouldn't start. Presumably, then, it had stopped of its own accord, just as Beth was driving past the garage, about ten minutes after leaving Dayton airport. Which in turn meant that Beth

– who could not recollect having stopped and had, for some time, clearly been *imagining* that she was driving past the garage, not just parked across the road from it

– had blacked out, either just before or just after the vehicle had stopped, and had then remained unconscious for almost two hours.

It was damned mysterious.

Even worse was what Beth saw when she awakened... the immense circle created by the unnatural blowing of the wind, then given sharper definition by the inexplicable scorching of the windblown grass, which ended up charred and smouldering; and then, infinitely more frightening, the discovery of Frank Bancroft, who had clearly died suddenly in mortal terror.

Since that incident, Beth had been more frightened than ever and Dwight,

though he tried not to show it, had become more concerned for her and himself – he had even started worrying about Nichola's safety. Indeed, from that day on he had begun worrying that his UFO investigations were putting them all in mortal danger; but when he discussed this matter with Beth, she insisted that no matter the danger, he must continue the work and solve the mystery that was tormenting him, thus ridding himself of the obsession once and for all. Dwight had been deeply moved by her concern and courage.

'The news about Ruppelt is terrible,' he said to Scaduto, 'but obviously it isn't why you called this meeting. You could have told me about Ruppelt on the phone, so what you have brought me?'

'Man-made flying saucers,' Scaduto said.

Dwight glanced left and right, at the other customers packed around the trestle tables to take in the sun while drinking and eating. There were really too many people here... too many... too close to him.

'Finish your beer and let's go for a walk,' he said, feeling paranoid.

'Sure,' Scaduto said. 'I understand.' He hurriedly gulped the last of his beer, threw the can into the trash can near the table, then proceeded to stroll with Dwight through the park, which was, on this sunny day in July, filled with local people walking their dogs, teenagers careening about on roller-skates or bicycles, children playing with bats and balls. 'I think it's becoming more certain,' he began, 'that the UFOs seen over various Air Force installations are actually top-secret, highly advanced USCanadian aircraft.'

He fell silent for a moment, letting Dwight take this in, but also relishing the melodrama, and continued talking as they meandered on through the park.

'I should remind you, Dwight, that at least *some* kind of saucer-shaped prototypes were actually constructed by the US and Canada: first, the US Navy's Flying Flounder and the Air Force's Flying Flapjack – projects reportedly worked on sometime between 1942 and 1947 – followed by the flying saucer that the Canadian government claimed had been aborted and passed over to the US in 1954.'

'Right,' Dwight said. 'I remember.'

'Now the most interesting thing about those projects is that the US Navy claimed to have dropped its project back in 1947, though it was known to be still involved in super-secret aeronautical projects scattered around the White Sands Proving Ground, New Mexico – where so many flying saucers have been reported. Also, the Canadian government, while admitting that the enormous UFO seen over Albuquerque in 1951 was similar to the one they'd

tried to build, claimed that they'd passed the project on to the US because they couldn't afford it... In other words, the UFO over Albuquerque could have been a US product based on the Canadian designs of 1947.'

'Where's all this leading, Tony?'

Scaduto stopped to light a cigarette and contaminate the pure air of the park with smoke. Though bright, he had an addictive personality that, so far, had given him a taste for alcohol, cigarettes and easy women. He had also flirted with marijuana, but so far had kept a decent reign on it. Inhaling, then exhaling a cloud of smoke, he started walking again.

'Ever since I began this man-made UFO business,' he said, 'I've found myself harping back on the fact that the first major contemporary sightings, the Kenneth Arnold sightings of June 24, 1947, took place near Mount Rainier in the Cascades in the state of Washington – which divides Canada from Oregon – and that Arnold had stated that *nine* silvery discs had disappeared in the direction of the Canadian border. As I've since found out, however, what wasn't so widely known at the time was the fact that on that very same day another man, Fred Johnson, prospecting about four thousand feet up in the Cascades, reported seeing six similar objects; and three days before that, on June 21, Harold Dahl, on harbour patrol in Puget Sound – which runs from the Canadian border to Tacoma – was following the coastline of Maury Island when he saw five UFOs manoeuvring fifteen hundred feet above the coast, before disappearing towards the open sea.'

'So what?' Dwight said, surprised by his own lack of patience. 'It's true that those facts weren't widely known at the time, but we covered the Arnold case pretty extensively at the ATIC, so we learnt about those other sightings a year or so later.'

'Okay,' Scaduto said, not remotely deterred by Dwight's show of impatience. 'Let's take it from there.'

Two young people were lying in the middle of the field on the right, under the shade of an elm tree. The girl, wearing tight blue jeans and a figure-hugging sweater, was practically buried under a young man wearing the same kind of jeans, but stripped to the waist. Writhing together and kissing passionately, they were lost to the real world – something that Scaduto clearly noticed with his envious gaze.

'Throughout that whole month,' he continued, tearing his eyes away from the couple on the grass, 'there were a hell of a lot of sightings over the northwestern corner of the United States. By the first week in July there

were also reports of strange, luminous bodies in the skies over the Province of Quebec, Oregon and New England. The following week, those sightings spread to California and New Mexico. By the end of the year – the same year the US Navy had, reportedly, *dropped* their flying saucer project – flying saucers were being reported from all over the country.'

'And the next major UFO flap was the Washington invasion of 1952,' Dwight said, 'of which I had personal experience.'

'Dead on the nose, pal.' Scaduto glanced back over his shoulder at the young couple making love on the grass, now a good distance away. The sight of them gave him distracting thoughts and forced him to concentrate. 'On reinvestigating that case,' he said, 'using your old ATIC reports as my map, I discovered that while the real flap had started on July 19, there was a record dated June 17 of several unidentified red spheres that flew at supersonic speeds over the Canadian air base of North Bay, in Ontario, then crossed over some of the southeastern states. I also discovered that nearly all of the subsequent Washington DC UFOs were reported as disappearing to the north, and that when the UFOs returned en masse, on July 26, their disappearance in a general northerly direction also applied.'

'All heading towards the Canadian border.'

'Right, Dwight, you've got it.'

'Well, it's certainly true that Lake Ontario and Lake Erie are as notorious as the Bermuda Triangle for the unexplained destruction of hundreds of aircraft and ships, the failure of gyroscopes and radio instruments, irrational behaviour in normally sane crew members, and, of course, the sighting of numerous UFOs. It's also true that Canada's one of the greatest aeronautical powers in the world.'

'Yeah,' Scaduto said, sounding richly satisfied. 'I never thought of Canada that way until I began my research. But during that research I came across an article, dated 1952 – at the height of the flying saucer scare – describing Canada as the Promised Land of Aviation. Considering that most Americans of the time thought of Canada as a kind of No-Man's Land, I was suitably impressed to learn that in fact it was the home, even back in 1952, of a remarkable number of the most prestigious aircraft development companies in the world.'

'It also had, and still has, vast areas of heavily wooded and uninhabited land – ideal for hiding secret aeronautical research establishments.'

'Just what struck me,' Scaduto said, clearly thrilled that he and Dwight were

on the same wavelength. ‘So having learned these interesting facts, I decided to find out, once and for all, whether or not the Canadian flying saucer project had really been passed on to the US Air Force and, more important, if the Air Force had then really dropped the project, as widely reported.’
‘So what did you learn?’
‘A lot.’
Dwight liked Scaduto and was, in a sense, envious of his relative youthfulness, naive optimism, and Brooklyn-based ‘street’ wisdom; but sometimes, as he was forced to admit to himself, the young man’s flair for self-dramatisation could be aggravating. For this very reason, he wanted to devastate Scaduto with a cutting remark, but all he could come up with was:
‘Stop teasing me!’
‘Okay,’ Scaduto responded, satisfied with the belief that he had managed to get one up on the older man, whom he admired and wished to emulate. ‘My research revealed that on...’ He pulled a notebook from his hip pocket and glanced at it... ‘On February 11, 1953, the Toronto *Star* announced that a *new* flying saucer was being developed at the A. V. Roe plant – now Avro-Canada – in Malton, Ontario.’
‘This suggests that it wasn’t the first one.’
‘Shit, no,’ Scaduto said, then continued to talk, picking up precise dates and details from his notebook. ‘Following that February 11 press release, on February 16, the Canadian Minister of Defence Production, C. D. Howe, informed the House of Commons that Avro-Canada was in fact working on a mock-up model of a flying saucer capable of flying at fifteen hundred miles per hour and climbing straight up in the air.’
‘Really?’
‘It’s all there in the morgues of the Canadian and other newspapers.’
‘Wonderful,’ Dwight said, becoming excited. ‘Please continue.’
‘By February 27, Crawford Gordon Jr., then the president of Avro-Canada, was writing in the house journal, *Avro News*, that the prototype being constructed was so revolutionary it would make all other forms of supersonic aircraft obsolescent. Next, the Toronto *Star* was claiming that Britain’s Field Marshal Montgomery had become one of the few people to view Avro’s mock-up of the flying saucer. Shortly after that report, Air Vice Marshal D. M. Smith was reported to have said that what Field Marshal Montgomery had seen was the preliminary construction plans for a gyroscopic fighter whose gas turbine would revolve around the pilot, who

would be positioned in the centre of the disc.'
'Oh, my God!' Dwight softly exclaimed, while glancing left and right at the many other people moving in both directions along the path winding through the park. 'The *Omega*!'
'Shit, man, you remembered! Yeah! The press dubbed that legendary machine "the *Omega*" and in 1953 the British *RAF Review* – the *Royal Air Force Review* – gave it a semi-official respectability by reprinting most of the unclassified Canadian research and including censored drawings of the actual prototype.'
'The research and those drawings were actually *published*?'
'Yeah... but only in Britain.'
'Man, oh man!' Temporarily forgetting his personal fears, Dwight felt like an excited schoolkid. 'So what was the *Omega* like?'
'According to the sketches,' Scaduto said, again glancing at his notebook, 'it was a relatively small flying wing, shaped like a horseshoe, with a lot of air-intake slots along its edge, ten deflector vanes for direction control, a single-pilot cabin topped by a cupola of transparent Perspex, and a large turbine engine that revolved around the vertical axis of the main body.'
'Then it disappeared,' Dwight said, trying to anticipate.
'Not quite,' Scaduto replied, still enjoying Dwight's shock and excitement at his revelations. 'In early November, 1953, Canadian newspapers were reporting that a mock-up of the *Omega* had been shown on October 31 to a group of twenty-five military officers and scientists. Then in March of the following year, the American press was claiming that the US Air Force, concerned at Soviet progress in aeronautics, had allocated an unspecified sum of money to the Canadian government for the building of a prototype of their flying saucer. Reportedly, that machine had been designed by the English aeronautical engineer, John Frost – who'd worked for Avro-Canada in Malton, Ontario – and it would be capable of either hovering in midair or flying at a speed of nearly two thousand miles an hour.'
Dwight gave a low whistle of appreciation.
'This hot piece of news,' Scaduto continued, 'was followed by Canadian press assertions that their government was planning to form entire squadrons of flying saucers for the defence of Alaska and the far regions of the north. This, they claimed, was because the machines required no runways, were capable of ascending vertically, and were ideal weapons for sub-arctic and Polar regions.'

‘Sub-arctic and Polar regions,’ Dwight repeated, practically in a daze.
‘Right,’ Scaduto said, glancing sideways and grinning when he saw the growing awareness in Dwight’s eyes. ‘So, do you want to hear the rest?’
‘Damned right I do,’ Dwight said.
‘On December 3, 1954, the Canadian Minister of Defence announced that the *Canadian* flying saucer project had been dropped, since it would have cost too much for something that was, in the end, highly speculative.’
Dwight stopped walking, glanced at the many people criss-crossing the park, walking their dogs, flying kites, roller-skating or embracing on the sunlit fields, and then found himself glancing more intently at them, wondering if they were as innocent as they seemed. He saw no men in black.
‘So what makes you believe the saucer project wasn’t dropped completely?’ he asked Scaduto, who responded by turning to a new page in his notebook and glancing repeatedly at it as he spoke.
‘Because on October 22 the following year, US Air Force Secretary Donald Quarles released an extraordinary statement through the press office of the Department of Defence. Among other things, he said that an aircraft of – I quote – *unusual configuration and flight characteristics* – would soon be appearing; that the US government had initiated negotiations with the Canadian government and AvroCanada for the preparation of an experimental model of the Frost flying disc; and that the saucers would be mass-produced and used for the common defence of the subarctic area of the continent.’
‘The sub-arctic area,’ Dwight murmured distractedly. ‘We’re back with the subarctic.’
‘Right,’ Scaduto said. ‘Ice and snow... But it didn’t end there.’
Now Dwight stopped walking to stare hard at his young friend. He no longer gave a damn who overheard him. Paranoid or not, he was convinced that everything he said and did was being monitored somehow. Given that conviction, whether sane or mad, he could only follow his nose.
‘Okay,’ he said, following his nose. ‘Tell me the rest of it.’
Grinning wickedly, Scaduto took a deep breath, held it in for some time, then let it all out as he started talking again.
‘By February last year, the press was receiving ambiguous Air Force statements about a revolutionary new aircraft that had been jointly undertaken by the US Air Force, the US Army, and the Canadian government. Then, on April 14, during a press conference in Washington

DC, General Frank Britten implied that the first test flight of the aircraft was imminent and that it was destined to revolutionise traditional aeronautical concepts.'

'So when's that test flight going to be?' Dwight asked, now realising that Scaduto's whole spiel had been leading up to this single, crucial point.

Scaduto brushed his ink-black sideburns with self-worshipping fingers and, taking a deep breath of the kind that all born actors employ, said, 'The test flight's already been completed. The results haven't been announced yet. But - get this! – the press has actually been invited to look at the saucer on August 25 – next month – at the Army Transport Museum at Fort Eustus, Virginia.'

'And we're both going, of course.'

'You bet.'

'What's the bet we don't see much?' Dwight said.

'I don't bet,' Scaduto said.

Amused despite himself, being otherwise deeply troubled, Dwight left the park with Scaduto, bid him goodbye, then hurried home to take comfort from Beth's embrace, taste her full lips, suck the juices from her mouth, then lose himself in the tangle of her arms and legs, in her centre, her very being, in that bed they had bought many years ago, when, in fear and trembling and mutual need, they became man and wife.

Dwight's dark cave was love.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Dwight's dark cave of love was a help, but not a cure, during the nightmarish month that followed his meeting with Tony Scaduto and the press conference arranged for the unveiling of the first officially acknowledged man-made flying saucer. Already haunted by her frightening experience at Frank Bancroft's garage, Beth had then started experiencing terrifying nightmares about UFOs and faceless men dressed in black. Soon she was also being tormented by the feeling that she was somehow being followed and kept under almost daily observation. She felt this even when in her car.

'It's hard to explain,' she told Dwight, 'because there's nothing I can put my finger on – nothing seen or heard or actually felt. But when I'm driving, particularly when on the roads outside town – empty roads – I have the feeling that something is pressing down on the car, exerting some kind of pressure, and that pressure is also pressing down upon and around me.'

She and Dwight were sitting in deck chairs out on the back yard of the tract house they had leased just a week ago, having decided that they needed something bigger than the previous apartment near Carillon Park. Nichola, presently playing in the small, pumped-up pool in front of them with a neighbour's daughter, Tanya Harper, was all of twelve years old and would soon be a teenager in need of her own space, so that had been their major consideration when deciding to move. As the sun was now blazing out of a clear blue sky, Beth and Dwight, both in swim suits and relishing the privacy of their own back yard, were trying for a suntan.

'Any effect on the car itself?' Dwight asked. 'Any malfunctioning?' 'No – yes! It doesn't malfunction, but it definitely drags. In fact, I often find myself checking the handbrake, thinking I forgot to release it when starting off. Then I find myself looking out of the car, trying to see what's around me, what's slowing me down.'

'Ever stop and actually get out of the car to look directly above it?'

'Yep. That shows you how bad it is. I sometimes get out and look up, but I've never seen anything. Strangely, that worries me even more. And I become almost sick with anxiety when Nichola's with me. I even feel that odd... *presence*... call it what you will... when I'm taking her to school.'

'Does Nichola feel it as well?'

'She's never mentioned it and I've never asked. No, she seems happy enough, belted in there.'

During the last two weeks of that sweltering July, 1960, Beth's nightmares had become more frequent and the feeling that she was never entirely alone increased dramatically. She began experiencing it while waiting outside Nichola's school, at the supermarket, sometimes even when sunning herself out in the back yard or tending to her lawn.

'I'll be feeling perfectly fine,' she explained to Dwight, 'engrossed in what I'm doing, and suddenly, right out of the blue, I'll find myself glancing around me, expecting to see someone or... *something*.' She shrugged forlornly. 'It's a feeling so strong, you're convinced someone is staring right at you and they're close – you know? Like about the other side of the yard fence, just across the street, or only a short distance behind you in the mall. A very *strong* feeling. Shivery. I'm thinking of the shopping, or about what Nichola's doing at school, or maybe where we should go on our next vacation – then, whammo! My head jerks around before I even know it and I find myself staring to the side, behind me, wherever, expecting to see... yeah,

a man, or men, in black. I always expect to see *them*. And of course there's never anyone there and, as I said, in some way that's even worse. 'Cause sure as hell it makes you think you're losing your mind or having a breakdown.'

By early August, Beth's conviction that she was being followed was confirmed when a black limousine did indeed start following her, just about every time she ventured out. At first she thought she was imagining this, but at the end of the first day with that vehicle on her tail – a particularly busy day that had her driving here, there and everywhere, including school in the morning, the supermarket, the houses of a couple of friends, then school again in the afternoon to collect Nichola – she realised that the limo was real enough and definitely following her when it stopped everywhere she stopped, then started up again and followed her when she moved off. By the end of the first day of this, she was truly frightened.

The process continued throughout a second day, then a third and a fourth. When Beth stopped, the limo stopped as well, always parking within sight of her, though never close enough for her to see anything other than the figures of men in... black suits. As they were always too far away for their features to be discerned, Beth was reminded of her nightmares, in which the men in black one-piece suits always seemed somehow faceless.

Finally, during the fifth day, when she was waiting for Nichola to come out of school and suffering the dreadful fear that the men in black might abduct her, she got out of her car and hurried along the sidewalk towards the limo parked a good distance away. The limo didn't move until she was approaching it – until she could clearly see the two men in the front – black suits, black roll-necked pullovers, dark glasses – but could still not make out their features. Just as she was coming close enough to see what they looked like, the limo pulled away from the sidewalk, did a U-turn and raced away from her.

At once relieved and frustrated, Beth returned to her car and waited for Nichola to emerge from the school. When she had collected her and was driving her back to the house, the black limo came out of a side street and sat on her tail again. When she entered the house, clutching Nichola's hand, the limo parked a good way along the street, but close enough for her to see it from the living room window. Just as she was picking up the phone to call the police station, the limo moved off.

'Just like that,' Beth explained to Dwight, snapping her fingers. 'As if they

could see exactly what I was doing, even when I was inside the house. The second I picked up the phone, those bastards drove off.'

That, however, was the last time she was tailed by the men in the limo. Unfortunately, during the second week in August, she began to have serious lapses of memory and what appeared to be brief blackouts, which, like her experience at the garage, left her feeling bewildered and disorientated. The blackouts were not dramatic and at no point harmful – she never collapsed or lost control when driving her car – but they were of a nature that was just as wrenching emotionally.

Preparing dinner in the kitchen, some time later, she would abruptly find herself lying on the bed or the sofa in front of the TV with no memory of having made the move, but with vague recollections of the usual nightmares about UFOs and men in black. Packing her shopping into the trunk of her car outside the supermarket, she would suddenly find herself emerging from the by now customary nightmares, this time slumped over the steering wheel, with the trunk still open and the rest of the shopping still in the trolley. Sitting in her car outside the school, waiting for Nichola to emerge, she would suddenly see Nichola standing forlornly on the sidewalk as the last of the other kids either walked off or were driven home by their parents. Though unable to recall the children emerging from the school, she would rush guiltily to collect Nichola, her head still filled with a vision of herself being surrounded by the men in black in a circular, brilliantly lit, white-walled room. Such lapses of consciousness, and the nightmares contained within them, gradually made her a nervous wreck.

Beth went to see her doctor and told him she felt tense and couldn't sleep, though she didn't mention the real cause of her problem. When Valium was prescribed, some of her tension slipped away, but even the sedatives didn't help when, watching Nichola playing with Tanya in the park, she lost consciousness again and awakened to see three men in black suits talking to both children. When Beth rushed towards them, the men, too distant to be made out clearly, glanced in her direction, then hurried away to melt into the trees around the edge of the playing field. When Beth, her heart pounding furiously, asked Nichola what the men had wanted, her daughter replied: 'They asked if my mom was Beth Randall. I said, "Yes," and they just looked at each other without saying anything else. Then you came along.'

'If those men ever come near you again,' Beth warned Nichola, 'you run away and come straight to me. Understood?'

‘Yes, Mom.’

Beth’s nightmares then became more vivid and frightening. She dreamed that the men in black had abducted Nichola. She had another dream about Dwight disappearing and never being seen again. Mostly, however, her dreams were composed of hallucinatory, fragmented recollections of that great circle of black ash around the garage once run by Dwight; the look of stark terror on the dead Frank Bancroft’s face; herself stretched out on what she felt was a surgical bed of cold metal, staring up at a ring of faces, some human, others part-metallic and dreadful: small creatures with alien faces and steel claws for hands; then curving, steel-grey corridors, a room filled with severed human heads and other bodily parts; and then herself strapped to a chair with a metal cap on her head; and, finally, white-painted steel panels sliding apart to reveal panoramic windows and, beyond them, a vast, desolate terrain of ice and snow.

The dreams, though fragmented, were relentless in the terror that they created for her, making her jerk awake, screaming, bathed in sweat, to be held and rocked by a concerned, helpless Dwight.

‘It’s real!’ she once sobbed. ‘I know it’s real!’

‘No, it’s not,’ Dwight replied. ‘You’re just having bad dreams, Beth.’

But even he didn’t sound convinced.

In fact, Dwight was, at that point, being torn between his real concern for Beth and his rage against those who were doing this to her. It was a deeply personal kind of rage, focused on the men in black, because he now believed absolutely that they existed and were responsible for what was happening to her. Yet even as his anger grew and he determined to fight back, he was frustrated because the men in black made no more appearances.

Instead, worse things happened.

The first manifestation was similar to Dwight’s experience in the motel outside Albuquerque, only this time it happened right outside his own home. Beth had taken some Valium and was still having trouble sleeping, with Dwight holding her in his arms, when the latter felt a distinct rise in temperature, heard a bass humming sound from outside, as if directly above the house, then was startled by the violent shaking of the bed as striations of brilliant light beamed in through the window. The bass humming sound grew louder, then turned into a vibrating presence, a faint pressure, as the room shook even more violently, with framed pictures swinging crazily on the walls and ornaments falling off chests-of-drawers and cupboards. Nichola

cried out in her bedroom. ‘Mom! Dad!’ Though sedated with the Valium, Beth tore herself from Dwight’s embrace and ran into Nichola’s bedroom as Dwight rushed to the window and looked out.

He stared into a dazzling radiance. It was beaming down from above the house – so bright he couldn’t keep his eyes open. Cursing, he fumbled blindly at the window catches, to unlock them and open the window. As he was doing so, the bass humming sound cut out, the room stopped shaking, and then, when he opened his eyes, he was able to see clearly again.

Moonlight was shining on the untouched back yard. Nothing else. He opened the window as Beth returned to the bedroom, one arm around the sobbing Nichola’s shoulder, patting her head reassuringly with her free hand. Dwight stuck his head out of the open window and looked up as high as he could, trying to see directly above the house. He saw a shrinking light, what might have been a shooting star, then it blinked out abruptly, leaving only the starry sky.

‘It’s all right, it’s all right,’ Beth was repeating consolingly to the sobbing Nichola, where they now lay together on the bed. ‘It’s all right, sweetheart.’

But it wasn’t all right. In fact, it was just beginning. During the final week before the press viewing of the Avrocar, as if as a warning to Dwight, the visitations occurred every night for five nights in a row, with the house shaking more each time, the noise growing louder, the inexplicable pressure becoming stronger, the contents of the house flung about and smashed, as if by a poltergeist. As Nichola howled in Beth’s arms and the latter shrieked for the manifestations to stop – not knowing who or what she was shouting at, but staring fearfully at the closed window – the striations beaming in from outside would start flickering like strobe lights, the rate increasing every second, until Dwight, Beth and Nichola saw each other as bizarre, jerkily moving figures in a disorientating, constantly changing, chiaroscuro filled with hellish noise and applying an indefinable pressure upon them, making them feel that their heads and hearts were going to burst.

Sometimes the burners on the cooker would come on of their own accord; other times water would pour out of the taps, flooding over the rim of the sink and onto the floor; then the electric lights, radio or TV would come on inexplicably, adding to the general bedlam and visual chaos.

Each night was worse than the one before, with the lights brighter and flickering faster, the bass humming sound deeper and increasingly *physical* – an infrasound – and the pressure around their heads tighter and giving them

headaches. Each night, when the phenomenon had ended, Dwight would either jerk the window open and stick his head out or run on to the front lawn to see what had caused it – and each time he only saw what he thought, or imagined, was a tiny light shrinking until it disappeared directly above the house, leaving only the stars in the night sky.

By the fourth day of the final week before the press viewing of the Avrocar, while the outside of the house remained normal, the grass on the front lawn and back yard was singed black. Remarkably, there was no damage to any of the neighbours' houses and tentative enquiries produced no sign that the neighbours – their houses all spaced well apart – had heard or seen anything unusual.

'If this happens once more,' Dwight told Beth when they were tidying up the latest mess of broken glass, picture frames and ornaments caused by the violent shaking of the house the night before, 'I'm going to send you and Nichola to stay with your folks.'

'Every night,' Beth said, practically whispering, as if talking to herself, not really there. 'Why every night?'

'I don't know, honey.'

'They don't attempt to get near us. We never see them. What do they want?'

We don't even know who 'they' are, Dwight thought, but I better not say that.

'One more time,' he said instead, 'and you're out of here. You and Nichola both. I don't know what it is, how it's happening, but I'm getting you out of here.'

'I'm not going if you don't,' Beth said.

'Yes, you are,' Dwight insisted.

The fifth night was the worst of all. The visitation came so late that they thought it wasn't coming, and Beth was actually slipping gratefully into sleep. It was just before four in the morning and she was lying between Dwight and Nichola, who was now too frightened to sleep in her own bed. Dwight was still awake, looking sideways at the two most important people in his life – his wife and daughter – choked up to see them sleeping together, when he suddenly turned cold, then hot, and heard that familiar bass humming sound. At first shocked, then plunging into a cauldron of rage and despair, he reached out to Beth as her eyes opened wide, changing instantly from drowsiness to terror. Even as Beth let out a moan and turned to embrace the awakened, frightened Nichola, the bass humming sound became

louder, an almost physical vibration, and the whole room began to shake, with the framed pictures again swinging crazily on the walls while ornaments and other bricabrac rattled and fell to the floor. As Nichola cried out, ‘Mom! Dad!’ and Beth held her close, pulling the sheets over both of them, light suddenly beamed in through the window, illuminating the bedroom, and then turned into a chiaroscuro flickering on and off with a rapidity that was totally disorientating.

‘Bastards!’ Dwight bawled.

As if in response, the bottom end of the bed leapt up in the air and banged back down on the floor. The lamp on the bedside cabinet became a fountain of crimson sparks and then exploded with the wires spitting blue and yellow flames. Instinctively, Dwight rolled off the wildly rocking bed, jerked the plug of the lamp from its socket, then smothered the flames with the shirt he had draped over a nearby chair. Nichola was wailing in terror under the bedsheet, being comforted by Beth, as Dwight crawled on hands and knees across the floor, showered in debris from the plaster exploding out of the ceiling and raining down upon him.

More cracks spread across the ceiling. The bed jumped up and down liked a crazed beast. The floorboards creaked, screeched and then snapped apart under the magically heaving carpet. Though dazzled by the flickering patterns created by what seemed like strobe lights, Dwight still managed to reach the door of the bedroom. Glancing back, he saw that the bed had stopped rocking and the ceiling was no longer raining broken plaster. Knowing that Beth and Nichola, no matter how upset, would be all right, Dwight, in a fury that obliterated his terror, jumped to his feet and ran across the living room, heading for the front door.

As he crossed the living room, more cracks zigzagged along the ceiling directly above him, as if tracking his movements, showering him once more in falling plaster and clouds of powder. Even here, the furniture was jumping, lightbulbs were exploding, and the mysterious light was pouring in through the windows, still flickering rapidly. Disorientated by this, Dwight repeatedly bumped into furniture and once turned in the wrong direction, but eventually, by groping his way along a wall, he reached the front door. Without hesitation, not caring if he lived or died, he tugged the front door open and rushed outside.

What he saw there stopped him in his tracks.

The lights beaming in through the windows of the house and flickering on

and off rapidly were coming from disc-shaped metallic objects no more than three or four feet in diameter and hovering in mid-air by the windows. The instant that Dwight, still in his pyjamas, rushed out of the house and stopped, frozen by shock, on the lawn path, the lights blinked out and the disc-shaped objects started spinning. The speed of their spin increased until they became no more than silvery-white blurs. Then they suddenly ascended vertically, as if shot from a cannon.

Looking up, Dwight nearly fell backwards with shock when he saw the small, spinning discs vanishing into what appeared to be an enormous black hole inside an even bigger circle formed by multicoloured lights that winked on and off rapidly, to form a dazzling kaleidoscope. Approximately 150 feet wide, that circle was exerting a downward-thrusting pressure that seemed to press heavily upon Dwight.

Glancing about him, he saw that the stars were visible outside that great circle of flashing lights and that directly below the lights, on the ground – at least what he could see of the ground where it wasn't broken up by fences and sections of the other house – grass and dust was being sucked up to quiver frantically or billow in a curved line that obviously formed another circle matching the one above.

No sooner had Dwight noticed this than the flashing lights blinked out, leaving only a black hole about 150 feet wide and definable only by the stars surrounding it. Then, with a speed that confused Dwight's visual senses, the black hole shrank, letting the stars rush back in, followed by an abrupt flaring of lights hundreds of feet up. The flaring light than shrank and vanished altogether, leaving only the darkness. Now, where that great hole had been, there was only the normal, star-drenched sky.

The grass and dust that had been sucked up in a matching circle had settled down again and the downward-thrusting pressure inside the circle could no longer be felt.

Realising that he had just witnessed the ascent of some kind of enormous, circular UFO and that the small discs had flown back into it before it ascended, Dwight hurried back into the house, through the living room and into the bedroom. He found Beth and Nichola embracing under the bedsheets, both frightened, though unharmed.

Convinced that the visitations were not only a means of warning him off his UFO investigations, but were also related to the forthcoming press viewing of the A. V. Roe man-made flying saucer, the Avrocar, Dwight

believed that the night before the viewing, tomorrow night, would be the worst of all.

‘I want you to take Nichola and go spend the night with your folks,’ he told Beth the following morning, as they sat side by side on the sofa in the wrecked living room. ‘I think you could both be in real danger. The effects of that... whatever it is... have been worse with each successive night, and I’m afraid that tonight the damage will be even greater – so I don’t want you and Nichola here.’

‘I don’t want *you* here,’ Beth said, rubbing her bloodshot eyes and looking haggard. ‘I’m convinced that sooner or later they’re going to enter the house and take you away. I’m sure that’s what it’s all about.’

‘If they do, I want to be here, Beth. I want to know who they are. I can’t run away now.’

‘If they take you, you’ll never be seen again.’

‘That’s a chance I’ve got to take, Beth.’

She clung to him, sobbing, begging him not to stay, but after comforting her, he

made her call her folks, Joe and Glenda McGinnis, and arrange to spend the night with them, in their home at the far side of Carillon Park. She was still sobbing as she packed an overnight bag for herself and Nichola, but she managed to gain control of herself when Dwight led her and Nichola out to the car and kissed them goodbye.

Dwight watched the car move off along the road and then disappear around the corner at the far end. It was six in the evening.

Returning to the house, which Beth had spent all afternoon carefully tidying, Dwight poured himself bourbon and then took an armchair in the living room, waiting for nightfall. The telephone rang. When he picked it up, Beth told him that she was in her parents’ home, that the short drive had passed without incident, and that he was to call her, no matter the time, when the visitation had ended. Dwight promised to do so, then he put the phone back on its hook and finished his bourbon. Two more were poured and a few more hours passed before the sun sank and darkness prevailed. Dwight kept the lights out. He waited patiently for the visitation. He sat in that empty room until dawn broke, but there was no visitation.

‘Nothing,’ he said on the phone to Beth at nine the next morning. ‘Not a damned thing. How about you?’

‘The best sleep I’ve had in weeks,’ Beth replied. ‘I feel like a new woman.’

‘It’s as if they knew...’
‘They knew. They know everything, Dwight. I’m convinced I was followed as I drove here, but they didn’t do anything. I think they’ve been warning you off – maybe because of today.’
‘The Avrocar.’
‘Yes. They were letting you know that they know what you’re doing and don’t approve of it.’
‘But they didn’t come last night.’
‘The warning’s over. I don’t think they’ll come back. At least not tonight or in the immediate future. They’ll do what they want, when they want, but it won’t be tonight.
If they’d wanted to stop you going to that press conference, they’d have done it last night. We’re coming home, honey.’
‘You do that,’ Dwight said.
He put the phone back on its hook, leaned against the wall, covered his face with his hands and sobbed tears of relief.

Later that day, Dwight flew to Washington DC, where he was collected by Tony Scaduto and Bob Jackson, then driven to the Army Transport Museum at Fort Eustus, Virginia. There, in a large, gloomy hangar-sized room that contained no other exhibits, with a whole pack of journalists and photographers, the latter including Jack Judges, who had first photographed the sole exhibit on display by flying illegally over the base, he was shown the formerly secret, now unclassified, man-made flying saucer prototype, the Avrocar.

What he, and the others assembled, were shown was an experimental, piloted aircraft, forty feet in diameter and weighing 3,600lbs, that combined the characteristics of air-cushion machines: a crude flying saucer based on the principles of the jet ring and, according to the Army press officer, barely able to rise above the runway during its recent test flight.

It couldn’t possibly be mistaken for what had come down over Dwight’s house the previous evening.
‘This is bullshit!’ Dwight whispered to Scaduto and Bob Jackson. ‘Just another red herring.’
‘Apart from the disc-shaped platform of this aircraft,’ the Army press officer informed them, standing beneath the Avrocar where it was dangling at an angle from the ceiling, ‘the most revolutionary feature of the prototype is the use made of the gyroscopic effect of a revolving power plant to acquire

stability. As you can see...' he pointed to the dome-shaped Perspex cabin in the middle of the disc-shaped body... 'the pilot is seated in a central Perspex capsule that can be ejected should the aircraft find itself in difficulties. A gas-turbine power plant of unconventional design revolves around this capsule at several hundred revolutions per minute. A stationary wing containing a series of slots in the leading edge, which feed air to the turbine, surrounds the rotating power-plant housing and forms the rim of the aircraft. Part of the intake of air is compressed, fed to combustion chambers in the wing, and ejected through a series of exhaust orifices lining the outer rim of the disc. The remainder of the airflow is fed over a series of vertical deflector vanes in the flattened trailing edge of the aircraft for control purposes. A tripod-type launching gear was planned to enable the saucer to take off vertically, but with the negative results of the test flight, the work never even went that far.'

'What technical details can you give us?' Bob Jackson asked.

'I'm afraid most of those are still classified,' the Army press officer replied blandly, 'but I *can* tell you that the powerhouse of this particular prototype housed three one-thousand-horse-power Continental J69-T-9 turbojets. It was designed to have a maximum forward speed of three hundred mph and a range of one thousand miles; but when test flown last month, it never did more than hover within ground effect.'

'Is this the only such prototype being developed?' Tony Scaduto asked.

'It's not the first,' the press officer confessed, 'but almost certainly it's going to be the last.'

'Why?' Bob Jackson asked.

'The truth of the matter is that although quite a number of aircraft featuring circular, disc-shaped or annular wing forms have been built and flown over the past few years, the aerodynamics of such shapes have been fully established. The design problems facing us are therefore formidable and, in the view of the majority of our engineers, probably insurmountable.'

'So what's happening to this project?' Scaduto asked.

'We'll be dropping it,' the press office said. 'As for this particular prototype, the Avrocar, to prove that all the talk of flying saucers is bullshit – sorry, ladies and gentlemen, I meant *nonsense* – we're going to leave it here on display for the benefit of the general public, along with everything else in the Army Transport Museum. We *have* been interested in the potential of air-cushion machines capable of vertical takeoff and landing – also known as

VTOL – to avoid the necessity of lengthy airways. In the event, the most we could come up with was this relatively primitive, so-called flying saucer. As for *real* flying saucers... well, if you want those, you'll have to go and buy yourselves tickets to some science-fiction movies, which I'm told are very popular these days. So please rest assured,' he continued when the laughter of the assembled journalists had died down, 'that the Department of Defence will soon be formally withdrawing from participation in this interesting, failed project and that no other disc-or-spherical-shaped prototypes are on the agenda. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you.'

'Withdrawing from participation with whom?' Scaduto whispered when the press conference was over and they were making their final, careful inspection of the Avrocar.

'Good question,' Dwight said.

PART THREE

Chapter Thirty-Three

Approximately three years after the public unveiling of the Avrocar, which had killed off most public speculation about the possibility of man-made UFOs, Jack Fuller, who had engineered the whole scam, was having a bad morning in his office in CIA Headquarters, Langley Field, Virginia. This was due mainly to the fact that he was in the middle of an acrimonious divorce from his second wife, Lorraine Sandison, and she was trying to drive him mad on the telephone.

After his disastrous, eighteen-month marriage to Belinda Wolfe, the ravishing brunette daughter of Georgetown aristocrats, Fuller had vowed never to marry again. He didn't want kids, he didn't believe in fidelity, and he had a low boredom threshold when it came to sex or romantic adventure. Unfortunately, he also had an eye for sophisticated beauties and an inability to take 'No' for an answer. His second wife, Lorraine, another child of wealthy parents, though from Alexandria, Virginia, had resolutely refused to surrender completely to him until he had agreed to tie the knot. As she was stunningly beautiful and an adroit sexual tease, he had finally caved in and convinced himself that this time the marriage would work out.

Once he had bedded Lorraine, however, his desperate need to possess her waned rapidly. Subsequently, he had refused to give her children, returned almost immediately to the pursuit of other women, and beaten her up once or twice when she refused to submit to his more outrageous sexual demands, which included what he thought was only a *modest* brand of sado-

masochistic frolics. Within three months, Lorraine, a notably cool and, in many ways, calculating beauty, was a sobbing wreck who spent more nights sleeping in her parents' mansion in McLean, Virginia, than she did in Fuller's fancy apartment off Dupont Circle in Washington DC. Two months ago, encouraged by her outraged parents, she had applied for divorce on the grounds of adultery and repeated sexual abuse – this after only seven months of marriage. In fact, Fuller had been relieved, wanting out of the marriage, until Lorraine started picking up the telephone to fill his ear with scorn and various legal threats. When Fuller wasn't listening to her, he was listening to his lawyer, which in no way made him feel any better.

Fuller was therefore in a bad mood when his secretary called through to say she had a former USAF Captain, Bob Jackson, on the line, wishing to speak to him on behalf of the Aerial Phenomenon Investigations Institute.

Aware that APII was headed by that troublemaker, Dr Frederick Epstein, that it was now using the meddlesome Dwight Randall as a freelance stringer in Dayton, Ohio, and that it had recently been kicking up a stink about CIA involvement in the suppression of information about UFOs, Fuller was about to tell his secretary to give Jackson the brush-off. But realising that he needed some distraction from Lorraine and her scavenging lawyer, and, also, that he could not resist finding out what Bob Jackson, Dwight Randall's best friend, wanted with him, Fuller told his secretary to put the call through.

'Mr Fuller?'

'Yeah, this is special agent Jack Fuller. Is this a personal call, Mr Jackson, or are you ringing up on behalf of APII?'

'On behalf of APII.'

'APII isn't popular with this office at the moment,' Fuller sardonically informed him. 'All that talk about CIA suppression of UFO information.'

'That's the impression we get, Mr Fuller.'

'Impressions can be misleading.'

'Actually more than impressions, Mr Fuller. We have a fairly substantial bundle of evidence here to support our contention that the CIA is involved in the suppression of UFO material and the harassment of witnesses.'

'Well, you guys tend to see what you want to see,' Fuller said blandly, 'and what you're reading isn't always what it seems. Your organisation has us all wrong, but this being a democratic society, I guess that's your privilege. So what did you call me for?'

'Because we're not at all sure that this is a democratic society.'

‘Oh? Why’s that?’
‘We’ve come across some old records indicating that you were the CIA officer in charge of the intelligence team that checked the Socorro UFO crash site with local farmer Marlon Clarke, way back in 1947.’
‘No secret in that.’
‘According to local newspaper records, Clarke disappeared soon after being interrogated by you and Air Force intelligence about the sighting.’
‘If you’re implying that the CIA had something to do with his disappearance, I can only say that’s paranoid nonsense.’
‘I wasn’t about to say that, Mr Fuller. I was only going to ask if, since 1947, there’s been any new information on the fate of Mr Clarke?’
‘The short answer is “No.” Marlon Clarke disappeared without trace and hasn‘t been seen or heard from since. We, the CIA, know no more about his fate than you do. But I’m sure that’s not what you really phoned me about.’
‘No, it wasn’t.’
‘Get straight to the point, Mr Roberts. I’m here to oblige.’
‘Are you willing to tell me, either on or off the record, exactly what you found at the Socorro UFO crash site?’
‘I’ve told this to the ATIC and I’ve told it to the NICAP and I’ve also told it to your APII investigators a thousand times: what I and the others found at the crash site was the remains of a Rawin weather balloon – no more and no less. As for Marlon Clarke, he was drunk when he saw the so-called UFO flying overhead, drunk when he drove out there to see it close up, and still drunk when we arrived at his ranch to interrogate him. As for his subsequent disappearance, he probably drank himself to death in the desert and then got dragged away by a wild animal. Those things happen to his kind out there. Anything else?’
‘Yes,’ Jackson said. ‘I don’t suppose it’ll come as any surprise to you that the two biggest civilian UFO organisations in the United States are feeling an unexpected financial squeeze due to a dramatic decrease in press publicity about UFOs and a corresponding wane in public interest.’
‘So the membership of your UFO organisations is dwindling,’ Fuller said, not attempting to hide his satisfaction.
‘Yes,’ Jackson admitted. ‘And it’s our belief that this came about because of a deliberate policy of suppression on the part of the government, through the CIA, which was bothered by our joint call for, and support of, Congressional hearings about the UFO problem.’

‘That’s some mouthful,’ Fuller said, ‘so I’m not sure what you mean.’
But of course he *was* sure... In July 1960, under pressure from the general public and, in particular, APII and the ATIC, the Senate Preparedness Committee had demanded briefings and résumés from the Air Force on some of the major UFO flaps, including the famous Washington DC and Levelland sightings. At the main briefing on July 15, the congressmen present did not go easy on the Air Force, practically siding with the civilian UFO organisations and insisting that in future the Air Force had to keep the committee informed of all pertinent sightings. Nevertheless, against the protests of Dr J. Allen Hynek, then a consultant to the ATIC’s Project Blue Book, but with the firm support of Fuller, on behalf of the CIA and Major General Luehman, director of intelligence, the call for public hearings was again resisted.
‘We weren’t in the least bit bothered by the thought of Congressional hearings,’ Fuller lied, ‘and certainly did nothing to head them off.’
‘Well *someone* did,’ Jackson insisted. ‘Within a few weeks of the committee’s request to be kept updated on all sightings and its recommendation that Project Blue Book be given more funds, it became perfectly clear that information on sightings was not being supplied and that the request for more money had been ignored. It had also become clear that the Air Force, despite the disapproval of the congressmen on the committee, was still insisting that it was doing all that was required regarding UFOs, when in truth it was doing nothing at all.’
‘Money recommended by Congressional committees often ends up being sidetracked – usually to other benefactors recommended by those very same committees. It may not be correct, but it’s hardly cause for conspiracy theories. As for the committee not being sent the sighting reports they requested, you’ll have to take that up with Major Friend, the head of Project Blue Book, not with me.’
‘There’s a rumour that Friend is in your pocket.’
‘Unfortunately, the Capitol thrives on rumours and that’s what most of these stories are. Friend is *not* in my pocket.’
‘Is it true that you and General Luehman, director of intelligence, were responsible for subverting the committee’s proposals?’
‘If it was, I certainly wouldn’t admit it, so why bother asking?’
Jackson actually chuckled at the other end of the phone, before saying, ‘May I continue?’

‘Sure,’ Fuller said.
‘Why were the Congressional hearings slated for 1962 dropped?’
‘Because the Chairman decided that there was no justification for continuing them.’
‘But the House Speaker, John McCormack, believed that the UFOs were real. That makes the abrupt turn-around seem pretty odd.’
Jackson was referring to the fact that House Speaker John McCormack, with the encouragement of the troublesome head of the NICAP, Donald E. Keyhoe, had started talking – too often, too loudly, about holding another Congressional investigation, and finally, in 1961, directed Congressman Overton Brookes of the House Science and Astronautics Committee to look into the matter. Brooks did so by appointing Joseph Karth, then head of the Subcommittee on Space Problems and Life Sciences, to hold hearings on UFOs. When news of the proposed hearings was released, Keyhoe promised that NICAP would offer proof of the Air Force’s incompetence in dealing with UFO reports. He would also, he threatened, prove conclusively that the Air Force had embarked on a course of ‘contradictory, misleading and untrue statements’ in order to suppress information about, and kill public interest in, UFO reports.
Neither Fuller nor Major General Luehman, director of intelligence, was thrilled at this prospect.
‘McCormack may have believed that UFOs were real objects,’ Fuller said, ‘but the other members of the committee weren’t so impressed when the man sent to gather evidence to be used *against* the Air Force came back to say he now supported it.’
‘You mean Richard P. Hines.’
‘Yes.’
‘We believe the CIA encouraged those statements.’
‘Simply not true,’ Fuller lied again.
In fact, though the hearings were not scheduled until 1962, in the middle of 1961, while the Office of Legislative Liaison was directing its attention to heading off the hearings, House Science and Astronautics Committee staff member Richard P. Hines visited the ATIC, was ‘thoroughly briefed’ by the Project Blue Book head, Major Friend, and returned to inform his fellow committee members that he was ‘favourably impressed’ with the Air Force’s efforts. Given this response, it was not surprising that a week after Hines’ return to Washington DC, committee chairman Overton Brooks announced

that the Congressional hearings were to be dropped and not likely to be an issue in the near future. The following week, Congressman Joseph Karth, slated to head the aborted hearings, publicly attacked Donald Keyhoe and, by implication, the other major UFO groups, including Dr Frederick Epstein's APII, for trying to 'belittle, defame and ridicule' the Air Force. He also accused Keyhoe of being guilty of 'malicious intent towards a great branch of the military.'

While the verbal slaughter of Keyhoe was still continuing, Chairman Overton Brooks died and the new Chairman, Congressman George P. Miller of California, confirmed that there would be no hearings on the UFO phenomenon.

'Listen,' Fuller said. 'Neither I personally, nor the CIA generally, can be held responsible for the fact that a Congressman with an open mind goes to collect evidence that could be used against the Air Force and instead comes back convinced that the Air Force is in the right. That just proved how wrong you and the other conspiracy theorists were.'

'Maybe,' Jackson responded quietly. 'But we now have strong reason to believe that Hines also informed his fellow committee members that Congressional interest in the UFO programme could be blamed on pressure from – I quote – "undisclosed sources on House Speaker John McCormack".'

'Where did you get that statement?'

'Wouldn't *you* like to know!'

Now it was Fuller's turn to chuckle, even knowing that Jackson's story was entirely accurate. 'If you don't reveal your source I can't verify the statement. What other surprises do you have up your sleeve?'

'We also have reason to believe that Hines, as well as dropping McCormack in the shit, dropped Donald Keyhoe in it by suggesting that he was the one who placed the so-called *undisclosed pressure* on McCormack. Since Hines and people like yourself viewed Keyhoe as the most vocal of the advocates for Congressional hearings – therefore the man most likely to break the wall of silence regarding UFOs – this would have been a good way of dirtying him with the committee, getting the hearings dropped, and discrediting his civilian UFO group and others like it.'

'More paranoid nonsense.'

Yet as Fuller knew, since he had been the one to plan it, that's exactly what happened. Once the Congressional hearings were dropped and Keyhoe

ridiculed, press interest in UFOs shrank dramatically and public awareness followed suit. Within a year of Brook's death and the final cancelling of the Congressional hearings, all the major civilian UFO organisations, including APII and NICAP, were suffering from a severe lack of funds and, even more damaging, from a lack of credibility. To add insult to injury, it was happening during a year, 1962, when sightings were three times higher than they had been in the former 'peak' years of 1947-1951. From the point of view of APII and NICAP, it couldn't have been worse. From Fuller's point of view, on the other hand, it couldn't have been better.

'I don't think it's nonsense,' Jackson said, running up his big phone bill. 'I think that you and your friends were behind Hines all the way, engineered the cancellation of the Congressional hearings, went out to get Donald Keyhoe and thus discredit the civilian UFO organisations; and even now, after seriously diminishing public interest in UFOs, are trying to get rid of Project Blue Book altogether.'

'Excuse the language, my friend, but that's bullshit. The CIA has no interest in UFOs, one way or the other. Though speaking personally at this moment, I think I can speak for the CIA when I say that very few folk here at Langley Field believe that UFOs exist.'

Which was another blatant lie. The truth was that right now, under pressure from the CIA, the ATIC was trying to transfer its UFO programme elsewhere and, hopefully, out of the Air Force altogether, to somewhere less visible. Unfortunately, neither NASA nor the National Science Foundation would touch it, which was giving Fuller a headache. Luckily, it had at least been made a part of the Foreign Technology Division (FTD) of the Air Force Systems Command, where it was languishing without the resources once insisted upon by the Congressional committee.

'All I can say,' Jackson continued doggedly, 'is that between the harassment of individuals and the suppression of civilian UFO organisations, the US government has managed to practically bury the UFO question.'

'The UFO question has cost the US government a lot of money, so that may be an understandable reaction. And for that matter, particularly regarding your conspiracy theories, if the US government is concerned with the UFO problem, why would it want to bury those searching for answers?'

'Because certain members of the US government already *know* the answers,' Jackson said. 'The UFOs are their own.'

Up to this point, Fuller had been mildly amused by Jackson's quiet

belligerence, but hearing that last remark, he turned deadly serious, though without actually showing it.
‘The man-made UFO theory is bullshit,’ he told Jackson. ‘The unveiling of the Avrocar proved that conclusively.’
‘A red herring,’ Jackson said.
‘Oh, yeah?’
‘Yeah. We have a researcher – I won’t give you his name – who came up with some interesting info about the construction of US-Canadian flying saucers.’
‘The Flying Flapjack, the *Omega* and the Avrocar,’ Fuller said without hesitation. ‘They’ve all been declassified and shown to the press and, therefore, the public. No mystery there, pal.’
‘No? We have reason to believe that the flying saucers you showed publicly are red herrings; that the real saucers are a lot more advanced and kept in various secret hangars on US Army, Air Force or Navy bases. Certainly we know for a fact that one of them is housed in a top-secret hangar in Cannon AFB, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Indeed, I personally saw it.’
‘*You* personally saw it?’
‘Yeah.’
‘When?’
‘May, 1954.’
‘Eight years ago. Are you sure you remember that far back? Maybe, like Marlon Clarke, you were drunk that night.’
‘No, I remember it well. And I was stone cold sober, believe me. I was driving to a motel on the road that runs right past the base and I saw a hangar at the far end of it, rising above the barbed-wire fence of a top-security area. That UFO, which was no piss-take Avrocar, descended and landed as I braked to a halt to study it more carefully. Then it was wheeled into the hangar. What I saw – clearly and at length - was a highly advanced, saucer-shaped aircraft.’
‘That sure is some story,’ Fuller said, deliberately sounding sceptical, though he was shocked by what he was hearing. May 1954, as he knew, was the night that the present APII stringer, Dwight Randall, then a USAF captain, had paid a visit to Cannon AFB in the company of fellow USAF captain, Andrew Boyle. Unfortunately, the latter had been observed on camera a few nights before, watching the descent of a US version of Wilson’s *Kugelblitz II* as it did, indeed, descend onto its landing pad in the base, before being

wheeled into the hangar that Jackson was clearly talking about. As it was believed that no-one would have believed Boyle's story anyway, he was left alone for a few days; but when he put a call through to Project Blue Book's Dwight Randall, inviting him to Albuquerque, a close watch was placed on him. Then, when he drove Randall straight from Albuquerque airport to Cannon AFB, followed all the way, and stopped on the road that ran right past the top-secret hangar at the far end of the base, well away from the main gate, it was decided to follow Randall, also.

When Boyle handed over the photo of the US *Kugelblitz II* to Randall, both men were observed by the Air Force intelligence men following them. It was those same Air Force intelligence men, all dressed entirely in black to propagate the myth started with Wilson's original men in black, who burst into Randall's room, scared the hell out of him, and stole the flying saucer photo from him. A few months later, when Randall was falling apart from fear, confusion and drink, Boyle, who had been transferred post haste to Alaska, was terminated in an airplane 'crash' over Mt McKinley.

Now Randall's other friend, this Bob Jackson, was claiming that he was the one who had seen that flying saucer descending on Cannon AFB. Fuller didn't believe so. He believed that Jackson had heard the story from Dwight Randall and was using it to try and screw information out of him while protecting his good friend. Well, that was his mistake.

'You have anything to add?' Fuller asked, 'before I drop this phone?'

'Yes,' Jackson said. His breathing sounded more nervous now, too harsh, stop-andstart. 'We have reason to believe that the flying saucers are being used mainly for work in sub-arctic areas. Since I personally specialise in the analysis of flight patterns and have worked out that most of the saucers appear to be flying on northernsoutherly routes, I believe the saucers are mainly flying between here and Antarctica.'

'Why?'

'I don't know.'

Thank God for that, Fuller thought. He was silent for a moment, then said, quite deliberately: 'This sounds like Jules Verne to me.'

'Don't be facetious, Mr Fuller. You know I can't be *too* far out.'

Still sounding slightly mocking, though in truth he was deadly serious, Fuller said: 'So what if this fantastic tale is true? What's it got to do with me?'

'We're going a long way back here, Fuller.'

‘So go a long way back.’
‘Given all the evidence now at hand,’ Jackson said, ‘the Socorro crash of 1947 almost certainly involved a man-made flying saucer. And if that’s true, you knew just what you were doing when you talked to Marlon Clarke before he disappeared. You’re in on it, Fuller.’
There was an uncomfortably long silence while Fuller considered what to do about this man, who was trying to be a hero while protecting his friends.
‘So what am I supposed to say?’ Fuller finally asked, having decided exactly what he would do.
‘Am I right or wrong?’
‘Right *and* wrong,’ Fuller told him.
‘Will you tell me more?’
‘Only under certain conditions.’
‘What are they?’
‘Let’s meet and work out an agreement. I need some protection here.’
‘When can we meet?’
‘The sooner the better, Mr Jackson. What about this evening?’
‘When and where?’
‘I know this little bar in M Street. It’s not very nice, but at least no one from Langley or the Capitol is likely to be there. A bit low-life, don’t you know? It’s called
_ ‘
‘Wait. Let me write it down.’
Fuller waited patiently until Jackson said he was ready, then he gave him the name and location of the bar in M Street, down near the Canal, and told him to meet him outside at nine that evening.
‘I’ll be there,’ Bob Jackson said.
Dropping the phone, Fuller kicked his chair back, placed his feet on the desk, clasped his hands behind his head and whispered, ‘I’ll bet you will.’

Back at his flashy Dupont Circle apartment, which had contemporary art on the white-painted walls, artificial-antique furniture, concealed lighting, off-white carpets and a total lack of idiosyncrasy or human warmth, Fuller mixed himself a dry Martini, then turned the TV on to the news. He rarely actually *watched* the news; he only listened to it. As he had no ear for music, it was *all* he listened to.

As he was having another sip of his Martini, his cat, a seventy-five percent Russian blue named Doc Savage, padded into the room, rubbed itself

against Fuller’s left ankle, then stood on its hind legs to gaze into the dimly lit goldfish bowl. Distractedly stroking the cat’s head, Fuller reached into the bowl, pulled out a wriggling goldfish and held it just above the cat’s twitching nose. When the cat saw and smelt the goldfish, he leaped up, snatched it out of Fuller’s fingers with his teeth, then ran back into the kitchen with the goldfish wriggling frantically in his jaws.

Amused, sipping more of his Martini, Fuller entered the subdued lighting of the bedroom, from where he could still hear the news on TV. Setting his Martini glass on the bedside cabinet, he stripped off his clothing, threw his shirt, tie, underclothes and socks into the laundry basket (his housekeeper came every day) and draped his suit with fastidious care over the coat hanger, which he hung to air on the closet door.

Naked, he glanced at himself in the mirror, noticed that his belly was still flat, given his advancing years (he’d soon be all of forty-two), then made his way into the bathroom. After emptying his bladder, he meticulously washed his hands, filled the sink with hot water, and soaped and shaved himself, using a gleaming strop razor. With the remains of the shaving cream still on parts of his chin, he went to the shower, turned the water on, adjusted it until it was steaming hot, then stepped under it. As his skin turned pink from the heat, he thoroughly soaped and cleaned himself, taking particular care with his anus and private parts, then let the hot water wash the soap away. When he had finished this cleansing process, which had left him with an erection, he turned the water from hot to icy cold, braved it for a minute or so, thus losing his erection, then turned the water off and stepped out of the shower.

He dried himself vigorously with a rough towel that further reddened his skin. Dried, he applied talcum powder to his private parts, anus and feet, then sprayed deodorant under his armpits and patted after-shave lotion onto his chin and throat.

Returning to the bedroom, he sipped more of his dry Martini, then studied his naked body in the full-length mirror. As he did so, his erection rose steadily again and he imagined a woman on her knees, slipping painted lips over it. Proud that he could still manage this at his age, he picked up his glass of Martini, carried it to the artificial-antique table where the telephone rested, and sat down on a soft, highbacked chair. After resting his Martini glass on the table, he telephoned his latest acquisition, a twenty-five year old secretary besotted with men of some authority. He enthusiastically stroked

his erection while whispering arousing obscenities to her, but finally arranged to meet her at Clyde's, also located on M Street, at 9.30pm.

When the girl had rung off, Fuller stretched out on the sofa, half propped up on one arm, sipping his Martini, listening to the babble of the TV and letting his erect penis return to normal, prepared for better things. Finishing off his Martini, he stood up again and returned to the bedroom. There, he dressed meticulously in a finely cut Italian grey suit, shirt and tie, with black patent-leather shoes. After transferring his billfold, loose change, keys, notebook, pen and small leather pouch from the jacket of the suit he had worn that day to the pockets of the fresh jacket, he checked himself once more in the mirror and left the apartment.

Lacking patience for the parking difficulties of Georgetown, he caught a cab to the bar located where M Street ran into Canal Road, which was dark at this hour. It was not dark at the front door of the bar, which was brightly illuminated by the street lights, enabling him to see the well-fed, middle-aged Bob Jackson standing uncomfortably beside a group of Georgetown University students, who were having their beer on the sidewalk.

Disembarking from the cab at the far side of the road, Fuller paid the driver, tipping him handsomely, then stood there for a moment, in the relative darkness by the bank of the Canal, watching Bob Jackson and recalling the many other times that he had either personally tailed him and Dwight Randall when they were together or had them tailed, photographed and recorded on tape by other CIA or FBI agents. From his personal observations, as well as from the audio and visual material supplied by his fellow agents, he had learned that Bob Jackson and Dwight Randall were very good friends, deeply fond of each other, with wives who also liked each other as well as their husbands. They were decent, good-hearted people who had shared a lot together and would, Fuller knew, be devastated if anything happened to any other member of their group.

Pity about that, he thought.

Crossing the road, he stepped up on the sidewalk and held his hand out to the portly Bob Jackson.

'Hi,' he said. 'I'm Jack Fuller. Have we met before?'

'No,' Bob said. 'So how did you recognise me?'

Fuller grinned and indicated the young students bunched up all around Jackson. 'You're the only person here over twenty-one,' he said, 'so it didn't need much deducing.'

‘Oh.’ Jackson looked a bit embarrassed, but was also clearly amused by Fuller’s comment. ‘Right, I see what you mean.’ He glanced again at the students, listened to the rock ‘n’ roll music pounding inside, and said, ‘You really think we can talk in there?’

‘Not really,’ Fuller said. ‘This used to be an adults’ place, but it’s changed with the changing times. Come on, let’s go to this other place I know, just a couple of minutes away. Just up the side of this bar, adjoining the building.’

He walked Jackson around the corner and into the road that climbed steeply up the side wall of the bar. They soon left the lamplight behind and stepped into a short, unlit strip where the darkness was deep.

Maybe Jackson sensed something, because he stopped and turned around to face Fuller, preparing to speak.

He never got the words out.

Fuller brought the hard, cutting edge of his right hand down across Bob Jackson’s neck, striking the jugular vein precisely enough to cut off the flow of blood to his head without actually damaging the vein itself. Instantly rendered unconscious, Jackson fell back against the wall and slid down it until he was resting with his back against it and his knees raised in front of his face. After glancing left and right, to ensure that no-one was coming, Fuller removed the small leather pouch from the inside pocket of his jacket, opened it, withdrew an already loaded hypodermic, and sank the needle into the back of Bob Jackson’s hand. Even as Fuller was placing the emptied hypodermic back into the leather pouch, slipping the pouch back into his pocket and walking back to the front of the building, Bob Jackson was suffering the violent spasms of a drug that would induce fatal heart arrhythmia without leaving any traces behind.

As Bob Jackson was going into violent convulsions, Fuller turned the corner of the bar, brushed past the students, and walked along M Street, to enter the noisily pleasant ambience of Clyde’s, where he found his latest acquisition waiting for him. A five-foot, four-inch blonde in a skin-tight dress and high heels, she threw her arms around Fuller when he entered and gave him a long, sensual kiss.

‘A good meal and a bottle of wine,’ Fuller said when he had managed to disengage. ‘Then we’ll make love all night. Life’s for the living, right?’

Chapter Thirty-Four

These days Dwight’s mood was one of almost constant depression. For three months after Bob Jackson’s sudden death by heart attack outside the

student bar in M Street, Georgetown, Dwight had felt himself torn between shock, grief and deep suspicion. The inexplicable death had been bad enough, followed by the usual horrors of seeing the grief of Bob's wife and two kids, not to mention Beth, then the funeral, the wake and the subsequent dreadful days of numbed disbelief. Making matters worse, however, was Thelma's bewildered insistence that Bob wasn't supposed to have been in Georgetown that particular night, that he was supposed to have come home for dinner with friends, but phoned at the last minute to say that something urgent had come up and he would be late home. Added to this, thus to Dwight's deepening depression, was his own fearful conviction that no matter what the coroner said about Bob dying from a heart attack, he had in fact been murdered.

This conviction grew in Dwight over the months as he tried to adjust to life without Bob and spent a lot of time consoling Thelma, who, with her blonde hair now streaked with grey strands, her formerly lush body filling out into middle-aged maturity, remained bewildered as to what her loving husband had been doing up a dark alley outside a student bar when he should have been home. This didn't make sense to Thelma; and nor could she understand what had made Bob so excited that he would leave a group of friends sitting around his dinner table, rather than hurry home to join them.

'That just wasn't in his nature,' she told Dwight, 'so it must have been something pretty important – something big.'

'Well, nothing was found on him, Thelma, so now we'll never know.'

Another cause of Dwight's deepening depression was the knowledge that ever since last year's cancellation of the Congressional hearings on the UFO phenomenon, which should have opened the whole debate up for the first time, Dr Frederick Epstein's APII, along with the other major UFO organisations, had been suffering an unprecedented series of financial and personal catastrophes, including a dramatic loss of subscription-paying members, due to lack of public discussion of the phenomenon, the abrupt withdrawal of funds from long-standing support groups and individuals, repeated investigations by an IRS desperately trying to find discrepancies in the organisation's accounts, and the damaging loss of a large number of staff through inexplicable illnesses, marital problems, and alcoholism brought on by various kinds of UFO 'hauntings', including nocturnal visits from the 'men in black'. Through all of this, Dr Epstein had battled on with admirable fortitude, but the exhaustion was beginning to show on his lined face, in his

prematurely greying hair and beard.
Last but by no means least, Dwight's depression was deepening because his increasing work-load for the understaffed APII was keeping him away from home more often and placing the marriage under strain, even as Beth, who'd had a couple of years of peace after the terrifying weeks leading up to the public showing of the Avrocar at Fort Eustus, Virginia, had started being tormented as before. Once more she was having dreadful nightmares about UFOs and men in black, actually seeing men dressed in black following her, either in a black limousine or on foot, though always at a safe distance. Also, this time, to add to her deepening fear, she was receiving numerous crank calls, some from people sounding mentally unstable and whispering insults down the line, others from 'deep breathers' who refused to say anything or simply chuckled before hanging up. Eventually, though no poltergeist manifestations were evident in the house, as they had been the week before the Avrocar viewing, Beth had become convinced that her car was being tracked by a UFO that often came down practically on top of her, yet somehow managed to always stay out of sight.
Dwight could not forget that the previous 'hauntings' had finished the day before the press showing of the Avrocar and had started up again the day after Bob Jackson's death. These facts convinced him that the hauntings, in both cases, were being organised by the same people, human or otherwise.
Interestingly enough, Beth had no more blackouts, though the lack of proper sleep due to the nightmares was turning her otherwise lovely face gaunt and weary. Noting this with concern, Dwight was startled to realise that Beth was now forty years old and that they had been married for seventeen of those years, with Nichola already turning sixteen. He and Beth, then, while clambering over that always-difficult bridge into middle age, were gradually being aged even more by the trials they were forced to endure at the hands of a malign, unseen enemy. Dwight wanted to give it up, turn his back and run away, but Beth, even in her own dire condition, refused to let him.
'To do that,' she said, 'would probably add feelings of failure to your already chronic mixture of anger, fear and frustration. In short, it would do you no good, Dwight, and might even do you a lot of damage. So never mind what's happening to us; just hang in there and fight this thing.'
'I can't help worrying about you,' Dwight replied. 'You're suffering even more than I am – they're getting at me through you – and I can't help worrying about that. Why don't you go away for a while? Take a vacation.

Visit your parents. Help them fix up their new place. They'd probably like that.'

Beth's father, Joe McGinnis, had recently sold his car-sales business and retired with his wife Glenda to Westerville, a pleasant small town located in rolling countryside about twelve miles north of Columbus, about a hundred miles from Dayton. They had only moved out a week ago and phoned the day before to say they loved the new house but needed some visitors to give it that lived-in look.

'Why not come down?' Joe had asked Beth. 'I know Nichola is still at school, but it's not a long way to travel, so you could come on your own. Besides, there are times when it's good to be alone. Might take years off you, gal.'

'I think Joe's right,' Dwight now told her. 'A change of scenery, away from it all, *could* do you good.'

'Do you think I could manage a vacation without...' Beth could hardly utter the words, because the thought of a negative reply was too painful to contemplate. She wanted to know if she could go away for a short break and not be followed by... *them*. Was there anywhere she and Dwight could be private, out of sight, out of mind? If not, then their life together was truly a nightmare from which there was no escape. 'I just thought...'

'It's worth trying,' Dwight assured her. 'What can you lose?'

'Okay, then, I'll try it for a week. When should I go?'

'It's only a two-hour drive, so why not go this afternoon? Leave now and you'll be there in time for dinner – and all mothers love to cook for their daughters, so that'll be a good start.'

'Mom's cooking and a bottle of Dad's beer. Sounds good to me.'

'Can't harm you at all.'

'Right, Dwight, I'll call them and check that it's okay, then I'll pack my valise.'

'You do that,' Dwight said.

After checking with her folks and receiving their approval, Beth packed a valise, had a quick shower, then let Dwight walk her to the car, an old but trustworthy Ford saloon. They kissed and embraced on the sidewalk, not caring who saw them.

'You take care,' Beth said.

'You have a good time for a change.'

'And don't let Nichola get up to any mischief.'

‘I’m a pretty stern dad.’
‘Okay, I’ll see you next week.’
‘Can I wait that long?’
Beth wrinkled her nose and smiled. ‘What a sweet-talking man I’ve got,’ she said. ‘Here, give me a big one.’
They kissed again, then Beth slipped into the car and drove off. Dwight looked on until the vehicle had turned the corner at the end of the road, then he glanced left and right, behind him, at the sky, hardly aware of what he had just done, instinctively, with foreboding, as he returned to the house.

Beth had told Dwight she would ring him when she reached her parents’ place. When she hadn’t called him by that evening, Dwight called his father-in-law and asked if Beth had turned up yet. Sounding anxious, Joe said she had not.

‘But the journey should only take two hours,’ Dwight said, ‘and she’s been gone for four.’
‘Might have stopped for a meal,’ Joe suggested hopefully.
‘No. She was planning to have dinner with you. Six on the dot, remember? Besides, if she knew she was going to be late, she’d have called, sure as hell.’
‘Maybe she simply had a breakdown. Let’s give her another hour.’
‘Okay,’ Dwight said.
An hour later, at nine in the evening, when Beth still hadn’t called either house, Dwight and Joe simultaneously checked with their local police stations regarding breakdowns or accidents. Neither station was holding a report on anything regarding Beth or her vehicle; they would, however, ask their patrol cars to try tracking her down and call back whenever they found her.
By midnight they still hadn’t found her.
Distraught, Dwight did his best to look normal in front of Nichola, who, at sixteen, was a tall, slim young lady with long blonde hair and radiant green eyes, dangerously attractive in figure-hugging denims and sweater, already drawing adolescent boys to the front porch, asking her out. Lying that Beth was with her parents and would be calling the next day, Dwight bid Nichola goodnight and watched her disappearing into her bedroom. Blessing God for his daughter’s presence, he cracked a can of beer and drank it while sitting in a chair placed strategically between the table containing the phone and a window overlooking the front yard. He sat there throughout the night, until

dawn, but Beth didn't arrive home, and neither the police in Dayton nor those in Columbus had found a trace of her.

Now almost out of his mind with anxiety, Dwight tried to hide it when he drove Nichola to school, dropped her off, and then, without realising he was doing it, glanced left and right, behind him, up at the sky. Seeing nothing unusual, though scarcely aware that he was looking, he quickly drove home again.

Beth's old Ford was parked in the driveway.

Parking his own car too quickly, practically banging into the Ford, he hurried into the house and found Beth sitting on the sofa, sipping from a cup of black coffee. When he entered, she glanced at him, repeatedly blinking her bloodshot eyes, then put her coffee cup down and jumped up to embrace him. Clearly exhausted, she was shivering and seemed on the verge of tears. Seeing the state of her, Dwight made her sit down again, then he put his arms around her and said, 'God, Beth, what happened? We've been anxious as hell.'

'I don't know. I'm not sure. Another one of those blackouts.' She shook her head from side to side, rubbed her eyes, blinked repeatedly and licked her lips. 'I can only remember the journey as far as the other side of Springfield. Somewhere along the road I must have lost consciousness.' She burst into tears, was consoled by Dwight, then tried recollecting the rest of it. 'All I remember is driving out of Springfield, heading for Columbus. It was about five in the evening. I remember this empty stretch of road beyond Springfield, then...' She lit a Camel cigarette, inhaled like someone drowning, trying to gulp in air, then blew a cloud of smoke and relaxed a little. 'Nothing!' She shrugged. 'Next thing I remember, I was still in the car, still behind the steering wheel, but the car was at the other side of Springfield – *this* side of Springfield – and parked facing back where I had come from: in the direction of Dayton.'

'Lord almighty!' Dwight said. 'What time was this?'

Beth checked her wristwatch, looked perplexed, then glanced at the clock on the wall. 'Judging by the time now, I must have awakened between eight and nine this morning. I couldn't tell the time because my wristwatch had stopped at five after five. That was either the time yesterday evening or this morning – I can't really say – though I'm pretty damned sure it was five after five last night.' She squeezed Dwight's waist and laid her head on his shoulder. 'Oh, God, I'm really scared, Dwight. This is worse than before. I

feel like I've been to hell and back - and I can't explain why. I'm shattered. I feel bruised inside and out... God, yes, I'm *scared*!'

She burst into tears again, so Dwight hugged her, stroked her hair, kissed the top of her head, then gently rocked her on the sofa until she had calmed down. Then he cupped her tearful face in his hands and kissed her on the lips.

'Lie down and have a sleep,' he advised her. 'Take some Valium. I don't want to encourage you to take sedatives, but I think sleep's more important right now. I'll be here. I won't be sleeping. I'll be looking after you. You've nothing to fear.'

'You won't leave the house?'

'I promise. Not until Nichola has to be picked up – and you'll be awake by then. Until then, I'm staying right here. So come on, let's get you into bed.'

When he led her into the bedroom, she just stared silently at the bed, clearly reluctant to lie down.

'You don't have to take your clothes off,' Dwight told her. 'Just have some Valium and lie down and you'll go to sleep instantly.'

But Beth shook her head in protest. 'No, I can't sleep in these clothes. I can't wear them ever again. I feel dirty in these clothes... contaminated... God, *I can't stand these clothes*!'

Distraught, she proceeded to frantically tear the clothes off her, like someone covered in stinging ants, until Dwight managed to soothe her again and sit her down on the edge of the bed. After making her swallow some Valium, he told her to stretch out on the bed and try to relax.

Even with the sedative, however, she insisted that she couldn't relax until she took off all her clothes and had a hot shower. This she did, becoming raw-red in water so hot that Dwight was compelled to reach in and turn the tap to mix more cold with the hot, lowering the temperature. Beth, naked and pink from the steaming water, still took a long time to thoroughly, compulsively, clean herself, but finally stepped out of the shower and, like a docile child, let Dwight dry her with a towel. Still naked and shaking her head from side to side, silently gesturing 'No!' when Dwight held out her night-dress, she crawled between the sheets and fell asleep almost instantly.

Boiling himself another coffee, sensing that he would not yet be able to digest food, Dwight sat at the table between the telephone and the front window, gazing out on the street, to where his car was parked practically nose-to-tail with Beth's Ford. He dwelt repeatedly on Beth's tale of driving

out of Springfield at five in the evening and awakening the next morning on the Dayton side of town, as if somehow her car had been picked up, transported back the way it had come, and deposited again on the road leading to Dayton and home. Eventually, on an impulse, and after checking that Beth was still soundly asleep, which she was, he left the house and went to check her car.

At first he found nothing... then, upon closer inspection, he found four absolutely similar indentations, two on each side of the car, placed equidistant between the wheels, just below the front and rear doors.

In a trance of disbelief and gradual acceptance, Dwight examined those indentations repeatedly and finally came to the conclusion that his senses were not betraying him... The indentations indicated clearly that four clamps of some kind had been tightened on the bodywork, under the four doors, between the wheels, to raise the car off the ground.

Whatever it was that had raised the car, it was at least physical.

For weeks after Beth's baffling, frightening experience, she suffered from blinding headaches and a repeat of the former nightmares. She also became more convinced that her fears about being followed by men in black had been justified... and she was seeing those men in her nightmares.

Finally, when she showed no signs of improvement, Dwight insisted that she visit a psychiatrist, if only to confirm that she was sane and had not imagined the whole business. He felt guilty doing this, as he was already convinced, by the indentations on the car as well as by Beth's undeniable sincerity, that the vehicle had indeed been picked up by a physical object and transported back to the other side of town while she was unconscious.

Nevertheless, he also felt that the psychiatric evaluation was necessary for Beth's peace of mind and would be a validation for what he had proposed should follow it: a visit to a professional hypnotist for the purpose of ascertaining exactly what had happened along that lonely stretch of road between Springfield and Columbus over a period of eighteen hours.

After a number of consultations with Beth, the psychiatrist, Dr Phillip Dewhurst, an old friend who had served as a medical officer at Wright-Patterson AFB, confirmed that she was not hallucinating and was, instead, suffering from genuine amnesia regarding the 'lost' period in question. It was the opinion of Dr Dewhurst that the amnesia was caused by Beth's deep-seated need to obliterate either a real experience or an exceptionally frightening, possibly repellent, fantasy. Dr Dewhurst therefore

recommended, as Dwight had hoped, that instead of a course of sodium amytal or Pentothal to break through Beth's resistance to her buried memory, she undergo regressive hypnotism with his friend, Dr Irma Sagan, B.A., M.A., M.D., formerly of the Society of Medical Hypnotists, London, England, and a highly respected psychiatrist in her own right.

Though initially reluctant to let herself be hypnotised, Beth, after a few more 'hauntings' and nightmares, agreed to let Dwight set up the appointment. Subsequently, a few days later, they were shown into Dr Sagan's office in downtown Dayton and asked to take the two chairs on the other side of her desk, facing her. Dr Sagan was a slim, attractive brunette with a bright, relaxing smile – certainly not what the nervous Beth had imagined a psychiatrist and hypnotist would be. When Beth released her nervous tension by blurting out what she thought, Dr Sagan just chuckled.

'I know what you mean,' she said. 'It's the curse of my life. Everyone expects me to be old, distinguished, grey-haired and, of course, *male*. They also expect me to be terribly solemn, maybe even intense or half-mad – Rasputin... Svengali. Luckily for you, I don't have to be either. This is a job like any other and I do it well. Are you feeling more relaxed now?'

'More relaxed for having met you,' Beth said, smiling, 'and seeing that you're not Rasputin or Svengali.'

Dr Sagan smiled in return. 'Fine. Now do you have any doubts about hypnotism? By which I mean, do you believe it can be effective in psychological terms?'

'I'm not sure,' Beth said.

'In other words, coming here wasn't your own idea.'

'No.' Beth glanced at Dwight. 'It was my husband's idea, initially. Then your friend, Dr Dewhurst, recommended it.'

'Do you trust your husband?'

'Absolutely.'

'Good. Now this is very important... Do you believe you *can* be hypnotised?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'Because I think it's self-suggestion. I think that if you *want* to be hypnotised, you can be. Maybe simple-minded or easily led people can be. On the other hand, if you don't believe in hypnotism, or don't want to be hypnotised, then it's not going to work for you.'

‘And you neither believe in it nor want it.’
‘I’m willing to try it on the chance that it might help me, but I don’t hold out too much hope.’
‘Those are very precise answers,’ Dr Sagan told her. ‘You have a strong personality.’ She stood up, walked around to the front of the desk, sat on its edge, directly in front of Beth, and stared down at her. ‘Let me assure you, Beth, that any intelligent adult and most children over the age of seven can be hypnotised, that only the mentally retarded and the psychotic can *resist* being hypnotised, and that hypnotisabilty is in no way a sign of weak will. Indeed, the more intelligent and imaginative the subject, the better a subject he or she will be. You therefore needn’t feel ashamed if I hypnotise you. There’s nothing *wrong* in being hypnotised. Just think of it as another branch of medicine and try to accept it.’
‘Okay,’ Beth said.
Dr Sagan smiled and nodded. ‘So how do you imagine I’m going to hypnotise you?’
‘You’ll make me lie down and use something visual and repetitive – a swinging key chain, a metronome – to focus my attention. Then you’ll talk to me as my eyes follow the movement of the swinging object.’
Dr Sagan smiled again. ‘You’ve obviously been reading up on the subject.’
‘Yes.’
‘What’s the time, Beth?’
Beth checked her wristwatch. ‘Thirty after eleven.’
‘Thank you.’ Dr Sagan placed the palm of her hand against Beth’s forehead. ‘What if I told you to raise your right hand?’
‘I’d ask why you wanted me to do that.’
‘What if I just replied by *telling* you to raise your right hand?’
Beth raised her right hand. ‘I’d ask you why you wanted me to do that.’
‘And if I refused to answer, would you refuse to raise your right hand?’
‘Yes,’ Beth said, still holding up her right hand, but clearly not aware that she was doing so.
‘Does this kind of conversation exhaust you?’
‘It does a bit,’ Beth replied, still holding her right hand up in the air.
‘Your eyes are heavy, aren’t they? Drowsy and heavy. Very heavy. So heavy you feel you want to close them, but you can’t close them just yet.’
‘That’s right,’ Beth said.
‘Would you like to lie down and close your heavy eyes and rest them for a

moment?’
‘Yes,’ Beth said.
‘Would you like to lower your right hand and walk to the sofa and lie down and close your heavy eyes for a moment?’
‘I would,’ Beth said.
‘Lower your right hand, Beth, and walk to the sofa and lie down and close your heavy eyes for a moment.’
Fully conscious and feeling that this was the correct thing to do, Beth lowered her right hand, walked across to the sofa, stretched out on it and closed her weary eyes.
Dr Sagan followed her across the room and took the chair beside the sofa. After switching on the tape-recorder on the cupboard beside the sofa, she leaned over Beth.
‘Do you mind talking to me, Beth?’
‘No.’
‘Would you mind answering my questions?’
‘No.’
‘Waken up, Beth. Open your eyes.’
Beth opened her eyes. She felt unusually tired, but more relaxed and less burdened than before. Glancing across the room, she saw Dwight sitting at Dr Sagan’s desk, looking extremely concerned as Dr Sagan rewound the tape on the tape-recorder and checked her wristwatch. When Beth sat up, yawning, stretching herself, Dr Sagan smiled at her. ‘What’s the time, Beth?’
Beth checked her wristwatch, expecting to find that only a few minutes had passed since she lay down. Instead, she found that two hours had gone by. She’d been asleep all that time. ‘My God!’ she exclaimed in wonder. ‘Thirty after one! Where did the time go? What...?’
She glanced up to see Dr Sagan’s easy smile. ‘Come here, Beth. Sit beside your husband. You’ve been in a trance condition for two hours and talked through it all. Would you like to hear what you said?’
‘I’m not sure,’ Beth replied.
‘I think you’d better come over here and sit beside your husband and listen to the tape. Your husband understands it better than I do. Please, Beth, come on over here.’
Beth swung her feet down to the floor then walked across the room, to take the chair beside Dwight. She stared with widening, fearful eyes at the tape-recorder and found herself mesmerised by the sight of that revolving spool

of tape. Her own voice, when it finally came off the tape, practically hypnotised her all over again.

The Beth on the tape, speaking to those in the room, gave flesh, blood and bone to Beth's nightmares. It was the disembodied voice of a lost soul, speaking from hell.

Chapter Thirty-Five

REPORT OF TAPED HYPNOTHERAPY SESSION

BETWEEN: Dr I. Sagan, B.A., M.A., M.D., of the Sagan Hypnotherapy Clinic, Dayton, Ohio, USA, and:

PATIENT: Beth McGinnis Randall, also of Dayton, Ohio.

PATIENT'S AGE: 40

STATUS: Private Patient (PP)

DATE: November 12, 1963

SUMMARY: Patient presented herself in the company of her husband, Dwight Randall, at the office of Dr Irma Sagan in the Sagan Hypnotherapy Clinic on November 12, 1963, on the recommendation of Dr Phillip Dewhurst, M.A., M.D., for immediate hypnotic regression and, if required, hypnotherapy.

The patient was suffering from repeated migraines, blackouts, and feelings of paranoia based upon the conviction that she was being 'haunted' by an unknown person or persons.

The recommendation for hypnotherapy was made by Dr Dewhurst after four consultations with the patient and his subsequent assessment that she was suffering from amnesia relating to a blackout that occurred on October 2, 1963, during a drive from Dayton, Ohio, to Columbus, Ohio.

The purpose of the hypnotic session was to regress the patient to the moment of blackout on October 2, induce a recollection of the event that had traumatised her, and decide a means of curing the trauma based on the nature of the traumatising event.

Penetration of the amnesia was achieved by taking the patient through the three prime stages of hypnotism: light, medium, and heavy, the latter being a state of somnambulism.

The trance session lasted a total of two hours and a complete regression was attained.

At the end of the trance session it was decided by Dr Sagan that the patient, when awakened from her trance, should be made to listen to her own description of the experience and then, in the full awareness of what had

transpired during her blackout, undergo a further series of trance sessions for the purposes of hypnotherapy aimed at relieving her stress while also ascertaining the reality or non-reality of the traumainducing event.
At the completion of a total of twelve further hypnotherapy sessions, it was the opinion of Dr Sagan, albeit offered with reluctance, that the patient's recollections in the trance state were an accurate recall of a real event.

Transcript of interview with patient in hypnotic trance state for inclusion in the confidential archives of the Society of Medical Hypnotists, 4 Victoria Terrace, Kingsway, Hove, Sussex, England.

DOCTOR: You are relaxing, relaxing, very relaxed. You are sleeping, deep sleep, sleeping, deeper, very deep. You are sleeping, very comfortable, relaxed, very relaxed. You are deeper and deeper in sleep, very comfortable, deeper. You are relaxed and comfortable. You are deep, deep in sleep. You are relaxed and you will remember everything and you will answer my questions.
PATIENT: Yes.

DOCTOR: All right, Beth, you are very relaxed. You have nothing to fear. You are going back to the evening of October 2, 1963. To the moment when you were driving out of Springfield. You are going back now.
PATIENT: Yes.
DOCTOR: Do you know where you are?
PATIENT: I'm in the car. I'm driving away from Springfield. I'm on the road leading from Springfield to Columbus, about fifteen miles out of Springfield.
DOCTOR: What do you see, Beth?

PATIENT: Just the road. The empty fields on either side. Not much traffic on the road. No traffic here. Sun going down. Almost dark. A nice, easy drive. It feels good to be...
DOCTOR: Yes Beth?
PATIENT: I don't want to.
DOCTOR: All right, Beth, you are very relaxed. You have nothing to fear. What do you see?

PATIENT: Feels funny... Someone following... No, there's no one there. Nothing out front. Nothing behind me. Fields all empty on both sides of the car. Nothing in the sky... Darkening... The sky's darkening... Strange feeling... Oh, no, not here as well! Something's following me... Not behind me... Above me... Damn it, where are you? Oh, God, right above me! *No! I don't want to!*

DOCTOR: You are safe, Beth. Relaxed. Very relaxed. There is nothing to fear. You are relaxed. You are safe. What's happening, Beth?

PATIENT: Beside me... Beside the car. Two of them... Flying saucers... Oh, God, Dwight, where are you? Come and see them! What you've always wanted to see. Oh, God, Dwight, where are you?

DOCTOR: Dwight's beside you, Beth. He's right here beside you. He's fine. He's okay. He wants you to describe the flying saucers. What are they like, Beth?

PATIENT: Not big... Not like the ones I've heard about... Small saucers, spinning discs, metallic and silvery-white, glowing oddly in failing light and spinning... Only two or three foot wide. Shaped like two plates placed on top of each other, one upside-down on the other... All metal. Smooth surfaces. Spherical. Seamless. Spinning like spinning-tops as they fly through the air, pacing the car, one on each side, parallel to where I'm sitting, very close to the windows... Now they're... *I don't want to! Don't want to! Don't want to!*

DOCTOR: It's all right, Beth, you're just remembering. It's in the past. You're remembering. It's all in the past. It can't hurt you. You're remembering and it seems to be happening now, but it was all in the past, it just seems like the present. In the present. Right now. It's right now, but you're safe. What's happening, Beth?

PATIENT: Two small flying saucers, one on each side of the car, right by the front windows, pacing the car, keeping up with the car. They seem solid... seamless... I can hear them – no, *feel* them. They're spinning like crazy, sort of glowing, and I'm not sure if I'm hearing them or *feeling* them, but there's some kind of pressure. Something pressing around me, making the car drag, slowing down... *Oh, my God!*

DOCTOR: Relax, Beth. Relax. No need to worry. Just tell me, Beth.

PATIENT: The flying saucers have stopped spinning. They're still flying, but they're not spinning... Oh, God, a slot's opening up in both of them... a glass eye... staring at me... God! What's that? Some kind of light – beams of light! Those things are shooting beams of light into the car... strange light... very bright and flickering on and off repeatedly, pulsating, making a noise... No, a kind of vibration... No! Please, *no more*!

DOCTOR: What is it, Beth?

PATIENT: My head hurts. I can't think. One of the beams of light is aimed at the hood of the car; the other's right in my face... I can't see

properly... The car's engine is cutting out... Oh, Christ, my head hurts... The light's blinding me... The car's still cutting out. God, it's stopping!
DOCTOR: It's all right, Beth, there's nothing to fear. What's happening now?
PATIENT: The car's gone dead and stopped and... *No! No! No!*
DOCTOR: Relax. You are relaxed. You are safe. What's happening, Beth?

PATIENT: Oh, God! Straight ahead! It's coming down over the road. Another flying saucer, but bigger.. *enormous*... About the size of an airliner. Lots of lights flashing around it. Descending slowly on the road just ahead. Hovering there – just inches above the road. Now settling down on the road and blocking my way with those flashing lights blinding me.
DOCTOR: Where are the smaller saucers, Beth? Are they still hovering at both sides of your car? Still shining the beams of light in?

PATIENT: Yes – *no!* I mean, yes, they're still there, one hovering at each side of me, but those slits in their sides have closed up and the lights aren't shining any more. I'm...
DOCTOR: Yes?

PATIENT: I'm trying to start the car. It won't start. I'm trying to get out and run away, but the doors seem locked, though I didn't lock them... Oh, God, I'm trapped here and my head is splitting and...
DOCTOR: It's all right, Beth. You needn't be agitated. I'm right here. I'm with you. Just tell me what's happening.

PATIENT: I'm trapped in the car. The doors are locked. I can't get the car to start. That gigantic flying saucer is straddling the road – over a hundred foot wide, as tall as an office building, with lights flashing on and off around its rim... No! The lights are going out. I think part of the body is spinning and slowing down as the lights flicker out... Now the lights are out and the big flying saucer is sitting there in darkness. Nearly dark. And... Now it's making a noise. A kind of bass humming sound. I can *feel* it – almost feel the sound, I mean, and... The flying saucer is opening. *Opening!* A long slit of bright light along the front, along its base... becoming bigger, higher, like a door or panel lifting up. And... it's a door in the front – a big door, like the door of an aircraft hangar – just like Wright-Patterson, Dwight – and... Oh, God, there are people in there... Just standing there, not moving, in the light of what looks like an aircraft's holding bay... Staring at me, I think... I can't be sure... They're silhouetted. Human figures... some normal... but some... Oh, Christ, some are so small! Small and misshapen

about the head and hands... The light... They must be distorted by the light... Oh, my God... *No! No! No!*

DOCTOR: You are calm, Beth. You are not really there. You are here. You are here with us, with Dwight and me, and absolutely safe. You are here and you are absolutely safe. What's happening, Beth?

PATIENT: Lights. Other lights. Two brilliant beams of light emanating from that huge saucer. Beaming right at my car, in my face. Flooding the car with light, flickering on and off repeatedly...

DOCTOR: You're safe, Beth. What's happening?

PATIENT: That noise... I can *feel* the noise! I can't think clearly because of the noise and... The light in that big saucer is expanding... No! A ramp is falling down... slowly... falling down to touch the ground, forming a path up into the saucer. Now... Christ! Something is coming out, emerging from each side of that holding bay... Large steel claws... Clamps of some kind... Now stretching out of the holding bay on hinged arms and hanging over the end of the ramp... They've stopped moving. They're just hanging there on the end of the hinged supports, like big steel claws on steel arms.

DOCTOR: What are the figures in the holding bay doing, Beth?

PATIENT: Nothing. They haven't moved at all. I can only make out the shape of them – not their faces – because they're silhouetted in the brilliant, almost blinding light. Also... My eyes hurt. I'm dazzled by the light filling the car and flickering on and off so fast that it disorientates me... And making that sound... The sound that I can *feel*...

DOCTOR: Yes, Beth?

PATIENT: They're just standing there – watching me, I think... God, those small ones aren't natural... the wrong shape. And... No, I don't believe this! Now the smaller saucers are shooting their beams of light at me again, at the car, front and rear of the car, and... *The car's moving!* It's being pulled forward! Oh, God, I've got the handbrake on but it's not holding the car back, the car is still being drawn forward... By what? The beams of light! They're drawing the car forward as the smaller saucers advance, taking me – I mean the car – towards the steel ramp of the big saucer and those men in the doorway... I want out! I want out! I can't move! *Oh, please God, let me out!*

DOCTOR: Relax, Beth. Relax. I'll make sure you get out. Just tell me what's happening.

PATIENT: The flickering light is doing something to me... pressure... numbing me... paralysing me... Ah, God, I can’t move and the car has reached the ramp and those claws – the big clamps on hinged arms – are moving down on both sides of the car, two on each side...

DOCTOR: You’re still here, Beth. You’re only remembering. Now tell me what’s happening.

PATIENT: The car’s rocking. The clamps are taking hold, one under each door, between the front and rear wheels, and... Ah, Christ, I can’t breathe! I’m panicking... trying to stop it... take control... Yes, better... Can breathe again.

DOCTOR: You can breathe again, Beth. You have no panic. You’re still in control. What’s happening, Beth?

PATIENT: The lights of the smaller saucers have blinked out and those saucers have flown into the holding bay and disappeared into the dazzling light. Thank God, they’ve finally gone... But... *Oh, no!*

DOCTOR: What is it, Beth?

PATIENT: The mechanical clamps... They’re lifting the car slightly and drawing it up the ramp and into the holding bay, into the brightening light... And those figures, silhouetted, they’re moving at last, parting, stepping aside to leave room for the car... I’m inside the saucer. *Inside!* Let me out! *Let me out!*

DOCTOR: You are relaxed, very relaxed, deeply relaxed. There is nothing to fear. You are deep, deep in sleep, you are relaxed and nothing can harm you. You are okay. You can answer my questions. You are in the holding bay of the flying saucer, but you have nothing to fear. You can answer my questions. What do you see inside? DOCTOR: Can you hear me, Beth?

PATIENT: Yes.

DOCTOR: Your car has just been drawn up into the holding bay of the big flying saucer. What do you see?

PATIENT: Light. Dazzling light. The bass humming sound has stopped. The figures are silhouetted by the light but are now on both sides of me, surrounding the car. The clamps on the hinged steel arms have just been released and the arms are now bending, withdrawing the clamps by raising them up above the car. The steel arms are moving back into the holding bay on grooved tracks, like railroad tracks, leaving the car sitting here... Every sound echoes here. The noise of the steel clamps on the hinged arms

reverberates as the mechanism moves deeper into the holding bay. Now it's disappearing from view, swallowed up by the bright light. The bass humming sound has stopped and my headache is gone. I can move, but I feel drained of energy and dazed... Oh, God, now they're... I don't want to! *I won't!*

DOCTOR: Tell me. It's all right, Beth, you can tell me. You won't be harmed if you tell me. What's happening now?

PATIENT: The silhouetted figures are surrounding the car. Most of them look like normal men, all wearing black coveralls. Though some of them... *No!*

DOCTOR: Go on, Beth.

(The patient does not respond.)

DOCTOR: Tell me what you see, Beth.

PATIENT: Some of them – the ones who looked small and misshapen in silhouette – are alien creatures. They have hands like the metal clamps that pulled the car into this place – metallic claws with hinged joints. There are metal caps on their heads, studded with... I'm a not sure... electric plug. Their eyes appear to be normal – not American – Oriental? But the lower half of the face is made of metal – nose and chin, I think. The metal covering the lower half of the face has no space for the lips – no lips at all. They look just like little men from outer space; they look hideous... frightening.

DOCTOR: Yes, Beth? DOCTOR: You can talk about it, Beth. It's okay. Dwight and I are beside you, both listening. Please continue describing them.

PATIENT: They're small – about five foot tall, maybe smaller, not much taller. Like the human beings, they're wearing coveralls, but silvery-grey instead of black. Now all of them – the human beings and the small aliens – are surrounding the car... I'm frightened. Yes! But it's all in my head... I'm not doing anything because, though I'm frightened, I also feel physically drained and mentally passive. I'm waiting for them to do something. Or for them to tell me what to do. Now they're standing around the car and looking in. They're looking at *me*.

DOCTOR: Is anyone speaking, Beth?

PATIENT: No. One of the men in black coveralls is opening the car door and dragging me out. Not exactly *dragging* me out, just sort of helping me. I'm frightened, but I don't try to resist. I don't have the will. He has to help me because I feel weak and dazed and dizzy. I think he knows how I feel.

DOCTOR: So the man in black has pulled you out of the car. What's happening now, Beth?

PATIENT: I'm looking around me. The sloping ramp is swinging back up to form part of the wall... Now it's closed. It fits so well, I can't even see the joins... The walls seem made of white-painted metal. Not walls – one wall – curving around on both sides of me. Part of the circular exterior of the big saucer; the roof of the holding bay... I call it a holding bay because I feel that I'm in an aircraft, or maybe an aircraft hangar, like the ones they had at Wright-Patterson AFB... The roof of the holding bay is dome-shaped. It has that hollow ringing sound, like all aircraft hangars have, but it's shaped like a dome – or only part of a dome... Shaped like a slice of orange.

DOCTOR: What else do you see?

PATIENT: Machinery. The big machine that lifted my car and carried it into this holding bay, but with its hinged arms now folded and the clamps – giant versions of the metallic hands of the small aliens – now folded down and tucked against the wall... More machinery. Lots of it. A bit like a garage. I don't know what kind of machinery it is, but I feel like I'm in a garage or an aircraft hangar... I'm seeing all of this in the bright light... It's all bright light and shadow.

DOCTOR: What happened next, Beth? The men have helped you out of the car and the door of the holding bay has been closed, so what happened next?

(Note: When Dr Sagan went into the past tense, so did the patient.)

PATIENT: I became very frightened again. Started shaking badly. I was looking at the small alien creatures, at their hideous, mostly metallic faces, and I guess that got to me. Then one of them, an alien, passed his hand, his metallic claw, over my face – he was holding something in it – and I felt heat going into my head and then I felt a lot calmer.

DOCTOR: You weren't frightened anymore?

PATIENT: I went kind of limp. I felt sort of dreamy, not real, removed from it all. It became like a dream.

DOCTOR: Yet you were still awake?

PATIENT: Yes. Awake. But as if I was dreaming. Dreaming though awake.

DOCTOR: Were there any distinct sounds in the hangar? Any signs of movement?

PATIENT: Yes. Shortly after the door closed – I mean, when the ramp was drawn up again to form part of the circular wall – I felt the floor

vibrating – not shaking, just vibrating – and then I heard a sort of background humming.
DOCTOR: Humming? The sound of low-powered engines?
PATIENT: No. A kind of bass humming – I can't really explain it – but not a mechanical sound. More like an electrical sound – very faint, yet distinct.
DOCTOR: Any sensation of movement?
PATIENT: A kind of floating sensation. But I wasn't too sure. I still felt a bit lightheaded. Though it *could* have been some kind of movement.
DOCTOR: Such as flight?
PATIENT: Could have been.
DOCTOR: And then? DOCTOR: What happened next, Beth?

PATIENT: I can't remember. I think I blacked out... Yes, I see corridors – curving corridors – with portholes along one wall and steel doors, all closed, in the other wall. Some doors were open – not many, but some. Then I caught a glimpse of what looked like a huge machine shop: jibs and cranes, catwalks, ladders, machinery, lots of men - I assume they were men, but they were a long way away - in grey coveralls. Then... *Oh, please God!*
DOCTOR: I'm still here, Beth, right by your side. You have nothing to fear. What did you see?

PATIENT: Another room. I was in a different room. Circular, dome-shaped ceiling, white-painted metal walls, men and women in white coats working at long tables between glass tanks that were covered in frost and... *Oh, please God, no!*
DOCTOR: It's all right, Beth. You have nothing to fear. What you saw was in the frosted-glass tanks. What did you see?
PATIENT: Bodies. Naked human bodies. Either sleeping or dead. With wires running out of their heads and attached to the inside of the glass tanks.
DOCTOR: Wires?

PATIENT: Cables. Electric cables, I think. They were attached to the inside of the tanks and other wires, or cables, were on the outside and ran from the glass tanks up to machines showing zigzagging lines on what looked like TV screens.
DOCTOR: EEG machines?
PATIENT: Pardon?
DOCTOR: Have you ever seen in hospitals, or perhaps on television, machines that record brain waves or heartbeats, indicating if a patient is alive or dead?

PATIENT: Yes.
DOCTOR: Were the machines you saw like those?
PATIENT: Yes.

DOCTOR: So the naked people, either sleeping, unconscious, or dead, were in frosted-glass tanks wired to machines that may have been recording their brain-waves or heartbeats.
PATIENT: Yes. The machines seemed like that. But the people in white coats, the living people, they're...
DOCTOR: Yes, Beth?
(The patient does not respond.)
DOCTOR: What are they doing, Beth?

PATIENT: Joining things together. Welding things. Fitting wires into sockets and soldering metallic joints and operating computer consoles and... joining things together.
DOCTOR: What things?
(The patient does not respond.)
DOCTOR: What things, Beth?

PATIENT: Severed heads. Amputated limbs. Internal organs... Oh, God, a human heart, still beating! Joining them to other human body parts and metal prosthetics... *I can't look!* I *won't* look!
DOCTOR: Don't look, Beth. You don't have to look. Look away. What happened next, Beth?
(The patient does not respond.)
DOCTOR: It's all right, Beth, you have passed through that room. You no longer have anything to fear. What happened next, Beth?

PATIENT: Can't remember. Darkness. Things gliding through darkness. Silence and darkness and breathing and the sound of my heartbeat. I'm floating. Can't see. I am where nothing is.
DOCTOR: Did you have a blackout, Beth?
PATIENT: Yes, a blackout. I think so. I feel that I had a blackout. Then I awakened in...
DOCTOR: Yes, Beth?
(The patient does not respond.)
DOCTOR: You had a blackout, Beth, and then recovered. What's happening now, Beth?
PATIENT: I'm somewhere else. Another room. Curved white walls, but I don't think they're metallic.

DOCTOR: An interior room.
PATIENT: Yes.
DOCTOR: And?
PATIENT: I'm looking up at the ceiling. Dome-shaped. It's brightly lit, but I can't see the lights. I think the lights are hidden.
DOCTOR: And?
PATIENT: I'm looking up at the ceiling?
DOCTOR: You're lying down?
PATIENT: Yes. On something pretty hard. Not a mattress. Something cold and hard. I think it might be metallic. When I move, it feels cold and hard.
DOCTOR: You're lying on something cold and hard, which may be metallic, and you're looking up at the dome-shaped ceiling.
PATIENT: Yes. A dome-shaped ceiling. White, like the walls. Curved walls, like all the other walls. All curves. All domes.
DOCTOR: And stretched out on your back on this cold, hard, metallic bed, looking up at the dome-shaped ceiling, you saw...

PATIENT: Faces. A circle of faces, staring down at me. Light beaming down on me. Spotlights, I think, not too bright or big, but beaming down from behind the shoulders of the men staring down at me.
DOCTOR: What kind of men?

PATIENT: Normal men. One handsome and oddly ageless, with very smooth pale skin, but with little movement in his features. Grey hair... No, white hair. Silverywhite hair. I thought the silvery-white hair was strange, because his face seemed so young... though expressionless.
DOCTOR: Young, but... What do you mean by 'little movement in his features'? By 'expressionless'? He looked human and otherwise perfectly normal?

PATIENT: Yes. Kind of handsome... At least given his white hair and the lack of movement, or mobility, in his features. I think he might have had plastic surgery, though I couldn't see scars or lines.
DOCTOR: Were you strapped to the bed?
PATIENT: Not a bed. A kind of table.
DOCTOR: A surgical table?
PATIENT: Yes, maybe that.
DOCTOR: Let's call it a bed. Were you strapped down?
PATIENT: No.
DOCTOR: Did you try to sit up?

PATIENT: No... Yes, I tried once, but I just couldn’t move. When I tried to move, I felt that I was paralysed – and that brought back my fear.
DOCTOR: Did any of the men surrounding you, looking down at you, actually speak to you?
PATIENT: Yes, the one with the youthful face, white hair, maybe plastic surgery.
DOCTOR: What did he say?
(The patient does not respond.)

DOCTOR: What did he say, Beth? PATIENT: Don’t worry. You’re not paralysed. You’re not hurt or damaged in any way. You will come to no harm.
DOCTOR: He spoke English?
PATIENT: Yes.
DOCTOR: Accent?
PATIENT: He was American – I’m sure he was American – but he also sounded kind of European, like those guys in the movies.
DOCTOR: When he spoke to you, did you try to reply?
PATIENT: Yes.
DOCTOR: You could speak?
PATIENT: Yes.
DOCTOR: What did you say?
PATIENT: I asked him where I was.
DOCTOR: And he said?
PATIENT: Nothing.
DOCTOR: Nothing?

PATIENT: He just smiled and aimed something held in his hand, a remote control, at the opposite wall. He pressed a button and two steel panels slid apart to form a big window, letting me see what was outside.
DOCTOR: What was outside?
PATIENT: Stars!
DOCTOR: Pardon?
PATIENT: Stars! I saw nothing but stars. Then he pressed another button and the light dimmed and the stars disappeared, and then I saw...
DOCTOR: Yes, Beth?
(The patient does not respond.)
DOCTOR: What did you see through the window, Beth?

PATIENT: Earth.
DOCTOR: Earth?

PATIENT: Not earth – *the* Earth. Just as I'd seen it in those films sent back by the satellites. The globe of Earth. At least, I think it was the Earth. It looked like the Earth on the films and photos I've seen. I'm convinced it was Earth.
DOCTOR: Did the man showing you this say anything at this point? Did he speak at all?
PATIENT: Yes.
DOCTOR: What did he say?
(Note: At this point in the hypnotic trance session, the patient, who has no reported interest in, or knowledge of, acting, adapted a surprisingly convincing male voice.)

PATIENT: Beautiful, isn't it? But why look so surprised? The Soviets and Americans have both put men into space – and that's exactly where you are, Mrs Randall... above Earth, in outer space, just like Yuri Gagarin, Alan Shepherd, Major Titov and Lieutenant-Colonel John Glenn. Indeed, next month the Russians will be putting what they assume will be the first woman into space – but you've beaten her to it. Don't you feel proud?

(Note: At this point in the hypnotic trance, even Dr Sagan seems so startled that she can think of nothing to say for quite some time. For this reason there is a large gap on the tape before the question-and-answer session picks up again. When the patient next speaks, her voice has returned to normal.)
DOCTOR: So how did you react when you saw Earth and the stars outside the window?
PATIENT: I was calm. I felt a bit remote. As if I'd been drugged. DOCTOR: Did the man showing you Earth and the stars say any more?
PATIENT: Yes.
DOCTOR: What did he say?
PATIENT: He said...
DOCTOR: Yes?
PATIENT: We picked you up by mistake. It wasn't you we wanted. We thought it was your husband in the car and instead we got you.
DOCTOR: Anything else?
(The patient does not respond.)

DOCTOR: You're safe, Beth. Nothing can harm you. Did he say anything else?

PATIENT: Yes. He told me I shouldn't worry. That they weren't going to harm me. He said they were just going to check that I was okay and then take me home. He said that when I got back home, I wouldn't recall what had happened to me, but that eventually I would be the means of warning Dwight that he was endangering himself, as well as Nichola and me, by investigating UFOs. He said that for some time I wouldn't remember my experience, but that it would all come out eventually, at the appropriate time, which was his way of warning Dwight off.

DOCTOR: And?

PATIENT: Nothing else.

DOCTOR: He said nothing else?

PATIENT: No.

DOCTOR: Not another word?

(The patient does not respond.)

DOCTOR: Did he say anything else? Anything, Beth? You can tell me. It's all right. What else did he say?

PATIENT: Nothing. He stepped aside. Another man, speaking German, held up a long, sharply pointed, silvery instrument... Awful! *Terrifying*! The others held my legs apart. The one with the awful instrument leaned over me, looking between my legs, and then... Oh, please, no! Please! Don't! Oh, God, it hurts! Please stop it! Oh, God, please, God help me, please don't, please stop him, I can't... Oh, God, stop! *No! No! No!*

DOCTOR: Relax, Beth. Relax. Relax, you are relaxed, you are safe, I am here, you are all right. Now tell me, Beth. It's all right to tell me. What else did they do?

PATIENT: No! No! No! No! No!

DOCTOR: Yes, Beth, yes, it's all right, I am here, Dwight is here, you're not alone, you can tell us, you can talk to us, Beth. What else did they do?

PATIENT: Oh, God, the pain! I can't bear the pain. Sometimes pain and then a kind of pleasure that goes beyond pain. Things inside me – in there. Deep inside me. Oh, the pain! Then in my ears, up my nostrils, in... I can't accept... I refuse to believe... But they did! They turned me onto my belly and put something in there... *Pain*! Please God, help me! First the back, then the front. Needles under my skin, metallic probes in every orifice, juices sucked out and liquids pumped in, and all the pain and even more pain and

sometimes... Oh, God forgive me... pleasure! Yes, that as well. They tormented me with pleasure that went beyond the bearable and brought me... my racing heart... *I can't breathe!*... to the point of... *pain*! Back to pain. Experimenting, trying to find out what was possible, from one extreme to the other, pain and pleasure combined... And all the time looking closely at me, studying me, as if I was nothing, a mere insect, something trapped on a glass slide under a microscope... Oh, God, help me, please let me go! Please don't! No more! *Please*!

DOCTOR: Forget it, Beth. It's in the past. It's been and gone. You are here now. You're safe. You're safe here with Dwight and me and can't be harmed, you are here in the present. Think of the present without fear and tell me what they are doing, Beth. They have finished and the pain has all gone and I want to know how it ended. No more pain. You can tell me. What did they do when they were finished, Beth?

PATIENT: Nothing. When they finished, they stepped aside. They took the samples they had taken out of me and then went away, leaving him – only him!

DOCTOR: The one with the handsome, oddly ageless features, and silvery-white hair and lack of expression. The one who spoke English with a slight European accent. What did he say or do, Beth?

PATIENT: I don't want...

DOCTOR: You are safe, Beth. We are here, you are protected. What did he say or do?

PATIENT: He...

DOCTOR: Yes, Beth?

PATIENT: He started lowering what looked like one of the metal caps worn by aliens onto my head – it was like being in a dentist's chair: the metallic cap was on a hinged arm – and he said he was going to erase my memory of this experience, but leave enough to be revived at a later date by others. Then he placed the metal cap on my head and somehow made it tighten around my skull. I was frightened. *I'm frightened!*

DOCTOR: Stay calm, Beth, be calm. Just answer my question. Did this metal cap have wires running out of it, attached to some kind of equipment?

PATIENT: Yes.

DOCTOR: Have you ever heard of a stereotaxic skullcap?

PATIENT: No.

DOCTOR: All right, Beth. He lowered the wired metal cap onto your head

and tightened it around your skull. What happened next?
(The patient does not respond.)
DOCTOR: What happened, Beth?
PATIENT: I'm frightened. Terrified. Don't do it! Please, don't do it! I won't tell anyone! I won't! I promise! Please, don't do it! *Don't*!
DOCTOR: What happened next, Beth?
(The patient does not respond.)
DOCTOR: What happened, Beth?
PATIENT: Pain. Stars. Sparkling lights. Darkness. I am where nothing is, in the darkness, and only know that I don't know.
DOCTOR: Don't know what?
PATIENT: My own name. What I am. Where I am. What is. I am where nothing is, in the darkness, and only know that I don't know. I know nothing. All gone.
DOCTOR: You blacked out again?
PATIENT: I awakened.
DOCTOR: Where were you when you awakened, Beth? What did you see?
PATIENT: I was nowhere. I was just awake. I knew I'd awakened.
DOCTOR: Where are you now that you've awakened, Beth? What are you seeing?
PATIENT: I'm still in the car. I feel sleepy... must have slept... I'm on my way to Columbus – just left Springfield – and...
DOCTOR: Yes, Beth?
PATIENT: Where am I? I thought the sun was setting. I was heading for Columbus. Why is the car...?
DOCTOR: Yes, Beth?
PATIENT: I can't believe...
DOCTOR: Yes, Beth?

PATIENT: That road sign... It says I'm heading for Dayton. I must have been driving home. I fell asleep driving home... No, I didn't. I couldn't have done that. I was driving to Columbus, out of Springfield, and now... Dayton. The car's parked by the side of the road in the direction of Dayton. It's... I can't tell the time. My wristwatch has stopped. It stopped at five after five, though I can't tell if that was yesterday or this morning... No, not this morning. It couldn't have been this morning. I was definitely driving out of Springfield, heading for Columbus, at about five yesterday evening as the sun was sinking. Now the sign says Dayton. The car's parked facing Dayton.

It must be *some* time in the early morning... I'd say eight or nine... and I'm heading back to Dayton... Oh, dear God, what's happening to me*? I don't want to! I don't want to! I don't want to!*

DOCTOR: Okay, Beth, that's all we want to know. You have been very good. You have been extremely helpful. You are in deep, deep sleep, very deep, deep sleep, you are relaxed, you are very relaxed, you are sleeping, deep sleep. In a moment you can waken up. You won't remember what's been said between us. You won't remember until I ask you to do so, you are asleep, deep, deep sleep. All right, Beth, you are waking up now, you are waking, waking slowly, pleasantly, you are pleasantly waking up. You can waken up, Beth.

TRANSCRIPTION ENDS

Chapter Thirty-Six

'There are now a great number of foreign exploration stations in the Antarctic,' Wilson's assistant, Salvatore Fallaci, said as he sat beside Wilson at the panoramic window overlooking the glittering white wilderness. 'Ever since the International Geophysical Year in 1957-58, the twelve nations have, with your co-operation, been spreading out to set up more and more bases. If they continue to do so, our security is likely to be threatened.'

A former Mafioso with his hands steeped in blood, Fallaci had been abducted and brain-implanted to obey Wilson's every whim as a scout and roving executioner; otherwise he seemed perfectly normal. He was reporting to Wilson after having just returned from a tour of Antarctica by flying saucer, checking on the movements and activities of the various nations that now had polar exploration bases here.

'It's been a long time since I studied the situation,' Wilson replied. 'What's it like out there nowadays?'

Fallaci glanced down at his notes. 'The US are based at McMurdo Sound and still have their Ronne Antarctic Research Expedition in the old Service East Base camp at Marguerite Bay. Australia has established stations on Heard and Macquarie islands, as well as their Mawson Station on the mainland coast of Macrobertson Land. France has established permanent bases in the Kerguelen and Crozet islands. The Argentines have established General Belgrano Station on the Filchner Ice Shelf. The Norwegians are at Cape Norvegia. The USSR, long active in East Antarctica, now also has Bellingshausen Station in the Antarctic Peninsula, is constructing at Novolazarevskaya, and plans additional stations in West Antarctica. A

profusion of British, Chilean and Argentine bases are now located so close together around McMurdo Sound that we must seriously consider the possibility that they're there for intelligence rather than science.'
'You think they're foolish enough to try that?'
'Yes, boss. The more you give them, the more confident they'll become – not really able to imagine just how much farther you've advanced – and the more confident they become, the more foolish they'll be.'
'That's true enough,' Wilson replied, though he didn't seem concerned. 'Good Sicilian logic. So what else are they up to?'
'Inland stations for the observation of the sun, weather, the aurora, the magnetic field, the ionosphere and cosmic rays include the Byrd Station for the US in West Antarctica, Vostok for the USSR at the south geomagnetic pole and the pole of relative inaccessibility, and Amundsen-Scott Station at the South Pole, also for the US. I should also remind you that a nuclear power plant was set up at McMurdo Station in 1962 and a seawater distillation plant is being installed right now and should be ready by next year. The Antarctic is no longer a safe haven for us. We're not alone, boss.'
Wilson smiled bleakly at that remark. 'We're not alone' was a catch phrase now widely used in the West about flying saucers, still generally believed to be of extraterrestrial origin.
'So apart from the possibility of intelligence gathering,' he said, 'what else excites their interest here?'
'They believe that western Queen Maud Land, actually Neu Schwabenland, right on our doorstep, could be similar to the gold-producing Witwatersrand beds of South Africa; that the mountain belt of the Antarctic Peninsula could be similar to the copper-rich Andes; that the Antarctic continental shelves near Coats Land and the Adéle and George V coasts could be comparable to the Agulhas Basin off South Africa and the Otway Basin off southern Australia, which are potentially great sources of petroleum. They're also racing to find the metal minerals for chromium, copper, gold, lead, tin and zinc. Even more ominous, their realisation that Antarctica contains nearly ninety percent of the world's ice has led them to serious discussion and experimentation regarding the possibility of harnessing it as a limitless supply of non-salt water. Last but by no means least, they're presently investigating the possibility of using the Antarctic as a long-term deep-freeze storage site for grain and other foods; and, even worse, as a site for radioactive-waste disposal and storage.'

‘I would never permit that,’ Wilson said.
‘I needn’t remind you of the increasing ruthlessness of the hunters of fur seals and the whaling ships operating around our shores and depleting the waters. I *should* remind you, however, that tourism, which commenced way back in 1958 with nineto-twelve day tours of the Antarctic Peninsula, arranged by the Argentine Naval Transport Command, is now expanding rapidly with hotels proposed for the McMurdo dry valleys and plans already being drawn up for the introduction of various alpine sports, including skiing and mountaineering, as well as commercial tourist helicopter flights over the wilderness. Between the planes of the tourists and those of the various exploration bases, we have a potentially serious security problem.’
‘I’m not too concerned,’ Wilson said. ‘As long as our mutually beneficial, clandestine trade continues with the various nations located here, they’ll keep their aircraft well away from Neu Schwabenland.’
‘That’s only the United States, Great Britain, Canada, and the USSR. The smaller countries aren’t included in the trade and therefore don’t know of our existence; so they’ll continue to fly in this direction, and, so far, have only been prevented from seeing us by the relative inaccessibility of the terrain. But they’re developing better aircraft every year – aircraft designed specifically to fly in polar regions – and some day, I believe, they’ll be able to reach us. Likewise, the forthcoming tourist-flight pilots won’t know about us and could choose this area as one of their flight routes. The mountain is, after all, particular spectacular from the point of view of the average tourist.’
‘I’ve anticipated that possibility,’ Wilson said, ‘and been working on a means of preventing it. As you just said, the mountain is already an area of inaccessibility. Before the smaller countries or tour operators develop an aircraft that can reach here
– and, indeed, before the nations we’re trading with grow arrogant and turn against us
– we’ll have developed an invisible force field that will, like the saucer satellites, which in turn were based on our old *Feuerballs*, cause normal aircraft engines to malfunction and force them either to crash or turn back before entering the area. Should anything manage to slip through the force field, we will have by then, as a last resort, a working pulse-beam weapon. So I think we’re safe for the foreseeable future. In the meantime, our saucers will continue to haunt the various Antarctic exploration bases by hovering over them, causing blips on their radar screens, or otherwise harassing their

aircraft – as, in fact, we've been doing for some time now, to the consternation of the pilots and intelligence agents.'
'That's why they describe a lot of the areas in Antarctica as inaccessible.'
'Precisely,' Wilson said.
Glancing through the window, down those dizzying depths between the sheer walls of the mountain where it formed a natural well, he saw the latest 250-foot diameter mother ship on its landing pad, surrounded by smaller saucers of various sizes. Viewed from above, especially from this great height, they looked like perfectly formed, silvery plates turned upside-down. With no protruberances of any kind, no identifying marks, not even a visible seam, they had their own bizarre beauty.
'So what's the general UFO situation in America?' Wilson asked his roving scout and assassin.
'No problem,' Fallaci replied. 'I can confirm that the virtual dissolving of Project Blue Book, combined with the ridicule heaped upon UFO witnesses and the suppression of information and news about UFOs – a task undertaken by Air Force intelligence and supervised by CIA agent Jack Fuller – has reduced public interest in the subject almost to zero, removed pressure from the Air Force, and given the civilian UFO organisations severe problems, most of them due to a lack of funds caused by falling memberships.'
'Falling because UFOs have been systematically erased from public consciousness by the choking off of news about the subject.'
'Exactly.'
'This all sounds very good to me,' Wilson said with a thin, almost good-humoured smile.
'It's certainly not bad,' Fallaci said. 'Still, we must continue to keep a watchful eye on the Europeans, Americans and Soviets who have, over the past few years, been cooperating more openly, which isn't good news for us.'
'They're co-operating more openly?' Wilson said. 'That *does* surprise me.'
'Me, too,' Fallaci said, 'but it's true. They've been drawing closer for the past few years, but really got into bed together in December 1962 with the formation of a multilateral NATO nuclear force; the signing in July 1963 of a treaty between Britain, America and the Soviet Union, banning nuclear weapons tests in the atmosphere, outer space and underwater; and, finally, the installing, on August 10, 1963, of a 'hot line' between the Kremlin and

the White House, to reduce the risk of accidental war. This unprecedented co-operation between these old enemies suggests that they may be hoping to unite into the one, all-powerful force that can eventually be turned against us.'

'Fear not,' Wilson replied with the supreme confidence of a man to whom emotion is alien. 'I'm giving them someone else to worry about. The assassination of President Kennedy – a good job well done, incidentally – '

'Thanks, boss.'

'As I was saying, the assassination of President Kennedy has already strained the US-Soviet relationship. As we anticipated, many Americans view his death as the result of a Soviet plot. Also, before this year is out, the Chinese will, with our help, successfully test their atomic bomb over Sinkiang, a western province bordering the Soviet Union. That will, I believe, make the Soviets more concerned with the Chinese than with us; while the Americans, still obsessed with the death of their president and his Soviet-loving assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, will be extremely suspicious of the Soviets and much less concerned with us.'

The intercom on the table beside Wilson rang shrilly. Picking it up, he listened intently, then he put the intercom down, swivelled around in his chair, and used his remote-control to turn on the 28"-TV standing across the room. A machine known as a video-recorder was resting on a stand beneath the TV set and it came on automatically to record the programme being shown.

'Intelligence,' Wilson explained to Fallaci. 'They say there's something on CBSTV that I should see. It's starting right now.'

When the picture on the TV screen came into focus, Wilson instantly recognised the parched terrain of Socorro, New Mexico, where the famous UFO crash had occurred on July 2, 1947. The very same day, Wilson recollected, that farmer Marlon Clarke, who had been unfortunate enough to see the debris of the crash and the corpses of the crew, had been abducted by another flying saucer and brought here. Clarke's severed head, which they had managed to keep alive for years, had recently been attached to a combination of human and mechanical parts. It was therefore still functioning, though programmed by a stereotaxic skullcap, as part of what would soon be a perfect, totally obedient, killing-machine cyborg. Now, thinking he was about to see a documentary of that old crash, Wilson was surprised to find himself viewing a documentary on another UFO crash in

Socorro – but one that had taken place just a few days ago.
What he saw enraged him.

On Friday, April 24, 1964, somewhere between 5.50pm and 6.00pm, Opal Grinder, manager of the Whiting Brothers' service station in Socorro, claimed that the driver of a 1955 model Cadillac, which had a Colorado licence plate and also contained the driver's wife and three boys, stopped at Grinder's service station for gas. The agitated driver told Grinder that 'something travelling across the highway from east to west' almost 'took the roof off' his car as he was driving just south of town, north of the airport. He suspected that the object had either landed or crashed, as he had also seen 'a police car head off the road and up a hill in that direction.' Continuing into town, he had met another police car heading in the same direction. To Grinder's suggestion that he might have seen a helicopter, the unnamed man said, 'That sure would be some funny helicopter!'

Subsequent investigations by the police revealed that the object had been observed flying only a few hundred feet to the northeast of the north-bound Cadillac at 5.45pm on April 24; it was 'egg-shaped, had a smooth aluminium or magnesium-like surface, and seemed to be a little longer than the four-door green 1955 Cadillac in which the family was riding.' The object dropped to barely ten feet above the ground, flew directly at the Cadillac, and passed silently within ten feet of its top, almost touching the tip of the radio antenna. It streaked onward a few hundred yards to the southwest, where it stopped abruptly, hung in mid-air for about thirty seconds, then descended vertically, silhouetted by the low afternoon sun, to land just beyond a small hill that hid it from the view of those in the Cadillac.

The driver of the Cadillac and his wife then observed a white Pontiac police car as it turned off a north-south road that ran west of US Highway 85, cut across the rough terrain, and headed for the rise beyond which the strange flying object had landed. Thinking that perhaps they had seen some 'new type of aircraft' that was being developed in the area, the driver of the Cadillac kept driving towards Socorro, eventually passing another police car. This one, which was from the New Mexico State Police, was moving urgently in the opposite direction, also heading for where the strange aircraft had descended.

Once in Socorro, the driver of the Cadillac stopped at the Whiting Brothers' service station on the north side of town, where he told the manager, Opal Grinder, that someone was flying 'a funny looking aircraft'

dangerously low over the highway on Socorro's south side, had landed, and was probably being checked out by the officer of the pursuing police car. Then the driver of the Cadillac continued his journey with his family.

The man in the white Pontiac was later identified as Lonnie Zamora, a thirty-oneyear old Socorro policeman described in a subsequent report by investigating FBI agent J. Arthur Byrnes Jr as a 'sober, industrious and conscientious officer, and not given to fantasy.'

Zamora's extraordinary experience had begun at approximately 5.45pm when he set off in pursuit of a speeding black 1964 Chevrolet, following it south, after pulling away from the west side of the courthouse. About a minute later, at approximately the same time as the unknown man from Colorado had sighted his UFO, when Zamora was a half-mile south of Spring Street, he heard a roar and noticed a brilliant blue 'cone of flame' low to the south-southwest, at a distance of approximately 2,400 ft. As Zamora was wearing prescription glasses with green sunshades, he was at this stage unable to distinguish the difference between the flying object's body and the 'blue cone of flame' shooting out of it. As the flame was over the location of a dynamite shack owned by the town mayor, Zamora assumed that the dynamite was blowing up; so instead of continuing his pursuit of the Chevrolet, he turned off the paved road and headed across the rough terrain, toward what now looked like a descending flame and sounded like a 'continuous roaring'.

Because of the position of the speeding Chevrolet, it was assumed by the investigators that its driver would have either seen or heard the descending object.

Zamora drove across the rough terrain, towards the roaring 'flame', for about twenty seconds. By this time he was able to note that the flame definitely was 'bluish, very brilliant, a little orange around the edges, more so near the bottom' and that it was 'sort of motionless, but appeared to *descend slowly*.' He could not see the bottom of the flame, which had just descended behind a hill; nor did he notice smoke. But some dust seemed to be moving over the area where the object had landed.

The 'flame' disappeared completely behind the hill, but the roaring continued as Zamora tried more than once to make his Pontiac climb the steep, gravel-covered slope. Then, as he finally began to ascend successfully, the roaring of the hidden 'flame' died away.

Turning over the hilltop, Zamora saw a 'shiny type object' down in the

ravine, or arroyo, to the southwest, at a distance of about 150 yards. He stopped his car for a few seconds, in order to study the object. At first he thought it was ‘an overturned white car’ with the far end raised higher than the nearest one. Then he saw two people in white coveralls standing close to the object.

As if having heard Zamora’s arrival, one of the individuals turned and looked straight at his car, then jumped slightly, as if startled by seeing him there.

Zamora had only stopped for a few seconds. Now, as he started forward again in his car, he noted that the object was ‘like aluminium – it was whitish against the mesa background, but not chrome’ and it seemed oval or ‘egg-shaped’ with support legs extending obliquely from it.

The individuals in white coveralls looked like normal human beings, but ‘possibly they were small adults or large kids.’

As he drove on again, Zamora descended into a dip and temporarily lost sight of the object and the two people beside it. Worried that he might have come across a top-secret experimental vehicle from the White Sands Proving Ground, and wanting one reliable witness other than himself in case of trouble with the authorities, he radioed to the sheriff's office that he was checking a possible 10-40, or accident, down in the arroyo, and wanted a New Mexico State Police Sergeant, Samuel Chavez, to come alone to the location.

As his message was being relayed to Chavez by Ned Lopez, the Socorro chief dispatcher, Zamora stopped his car again and started to get out, still talking on the radio. He dropped the microphone accidentally and leaned down to retrieve it. Even as he was straightening up again, he heard ‘a heavy slam, metal-like, heavier than a tank hatch... then another slam, *real loud*.’

He was completely out of his car and could see the object in clear view, about fifty feet away from the arroyo, with two of its four support legs extending obliquely down to the ground. He could also see, for the first time, a large, red insignia on one side of the object’s otherwise smooth, featureless, egg-shaped body.

The two individuals in white coveralls had disappeared – a fact that, combined with the metallic ‘slamming’ noises heard by Zamora, made him assume that they had entered the strange craft by some unseen door.

He had only taken two or three steps toward the object when he heard ‘a roar... not exactly a blast, very loud roar... not like a jet... started low

frequency quickly, then rose in frequency – a higher tone – and in loudness, from loud to very loud.' At the same time he saw 'bright blue flame' shooting out from the underside of the object as it started to rise vertically from the ground.

Thinking that the object was about to explode, Zamora threw himself to the ground. He felt a wave of heat, but when no explosion came, though the roaring continued, he got up again and ran back to his car. Bumping into it while glancing fearfully back over his shoulder, he lost his glasses and sunshades. Determined to keep the car between himself and the ascending object, which he still felt might explode, he ran north across the mesa, glancing back two or three times to observe that in about five or six seconds the object had risen level with his car, about twenty feet above the bottom of the arroyo. It was still roaring and shooting flame from its underside.

About fifty feet from his car, when just over the rim of the hill, Zamora turned back towards the object, but shielded his eyes with his arm in case it exploded.

At that moment, the roaring stopped and was replaced by a 'sharp tone, a whining sound' that went 'from high tone to low tone in maybe a second, then stopped.' And then there was silence.

Zamora saw that the object was no longer rising, though it *was* still moving: heading away quickly, in perfect silence, west-southwest, passing over, or, rather, south of, the dynamite shack as it flew away.

Realising that the object was in flight and not exploding as he had feared, Zamora raced back to his car, picked up his glasses and sunshades from where they had fallen, then once more radioed the Socorro chief dispatcher, Ned Lopez.

Lopez later confirmed that he had received the call from Zamora, breathlessly telling him to look out the window of the sheriff's office to see if the object was in sight. As Lopez was at the north window, not the south, and therefore could not see the object, he asked Zamora what kind of object it was. Zamora said, 'It looks like a balloon.'

Even as he was talking to Lopez, Zamora was watching the UFO disappearing in the distance. It stayed about ten to fifteen feet above the ground, following the terrain, until it was near the perlite mill on the west side of US 60, about a mile away. There, it 'suddenly angled up in a steep climb and got small in the distance, over the canyon or mountain that way, *very fast*.' He later remembered it as 'a bright, whitish oval getting smaller

and smaller as it sped away, upward and over the mountains.'
Approximately one minute and fifty seconds after Zamora had first heard the roar and seen the 'flame' in the sky, the UFO was gone.
Sent urgently to the landing zone by the message relayed through chief dispatcher Ned Lopez, New Mexico State Police Sergeant, Sam Chavez, reached Zamora just after the UFO had disappeared. Even as Chavez was approaching Zamora, the latter was making a sketch of the red insignia he had seen on the object before it took off. Though he had remained calm enough to do this, he was, according to Chavez, as 'white as a sheet' and in a cold sweat.
Examining the landing site with Zamora, Chavez also saw that the brush was smouldering in several places, after being ignited by the flame, and that there was what appeared to be a 'quadrangle' formed by four heavy, wedge-shaped imprints in the soil.
'So there you have it, folks,' the TV reporter said breezily, standing in front of the barren landing site in the wastelands outside Socorro with a microphone in his hand and a view of the dynamite shack over his right shoulder. 'A widely respected Deputy Marshal of Socorro, New Mexico, has stated categorically that he's seen a flying saucer *and* its occupants. Whether it's true or not remains to be seen. Maybe we're *not* alone, folks!'

Wilson used the remote control to switch the TV off. Then, quietly furious, he turned to Fallaci and said: 'The damned fools! That was one of *their* experimental saucers from the White Sands Proving Ground. This will probably resurrect worldwide interest in flying saucers. I have to see Fuller.'
'I'll get him,' Fallaci said.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Wilson was right. The Socorro Incident of April 24, 1964, soon became the most famous UFO sighting since the original Socorro sighting of 1947, resurrecting widespread public interest in the subject and replenishing the depleted financial resources of the leading civilian UFO organisations by dramatically increasing their membership to what it had been three years earlier, before the dropping of Congressional hearings and the propaganda campaign against NICAP's Donald E. Keyhoe had taken their toll.

A few weeks after the Socorro Incident, Randall flew to Washington DC to have a meeting with Dr Frederick Epstein and Tony Scaduto in the revitalised APII organisation headquarters in 21st Street. As Scaduto had just returned from New Mexico, where he had been sent by Dr Epstein to check

out the Socorro Incident, the purpose of the meeting was to hear what he had to say. Since Epstein was at that stage convinced that the UFOs were of extraterrestrial origin, Scaduto and Randall had still not confided their belief that at least some of the flying saucers could be man-made. Scaduto was now looking uncomfortable, because he was close to that subject.

'First thing I learned when I got to Socorro,' he reported, 'is that Deputy Marshal Zamora's radio transmissions had been heard by others, including State Police Senior Patrolman Ted V. Jordan, who arrived at the landing site shortly after Chavez, in the company of Socorro Under-Sheriff James Luckie. A cattle inspector named White, who had also heard Zamora's radio calls, turned up at the landing site; and just after 6.00pm, FBI agent J. Arthur Byrnes arrived to investigate.'

'So what did *you* find?' Dr Epstein asked in his quiet, thoughtful way, while stroking his Vandyke beard, which now had lots of grey strands in it.

'I found the burnt brush, which seemed genuine enough,' Scaduto replied. 'I then interviewed every witness I could find – the ones who'd seen the brush when the burning was still recent – and they all confirmed that the brush had been scorched by flames and that the pad prints, or landing imprints, had been made, in the words of one investigator, "by wedge-shaped units being forced by great weight down into the well-packed soil of the ravine."'

'What size would they have been?' Epstein asked, letting the tip of his ballpoint pen dangle over his notebook.

'The wedges would have had a horizontal length of twelve to sixteen inches, a horizontal width of six to eight inches, and a vertical wedge-depth of four to six inches. I have to say, though, that this latter measurement was impossible to define accurately because of the inward falling of the soil.'

Scaduto withdrew a press cutting from his jacket pocket, unfolded it and smoothed it down on Epstein's desk with the palm of his hand.

'According to the detailed account in the April 28, 1964 edition of the local biweekly newspaper, *El Defensor Chieftain*,' he continued, reading from the press cutting, 'the landing gear imprints – I quote: "did not appear to have been made by an object striking the earth with great force, but by an object of considerable weight settling to earth at slow speed and not moving after touching the ground."'

He pushed the press cutting towards Dr Epstein, watched the older man pick it up enthusiastically, grinned nervously at Dwight, and then spoke again directly to Epstein.

‘Though some of the brush was still smouldering when Chavez, Jordan, Luckie and White were present, they all agreed that there was no odour indicating that combustion of any conventional fuel had caused the burn damage.’
‘Very good,’ Epstein murmured.
‘Jordan was particularly impressed by the fact that the flame described by Zamora had obviously sliced a large greasewood bush located almost centrally in the landing gear quadrilateral, without leaving any signs of turbulence, like the kind that would have been caused by normal rotors or jet exhausts. Jordan also took Polaroid pictures of the landing site and the four imprints within minutes of arriving on the scene.’
‘You obtained copies?’ Epstein asked, suddenly frowning like a stern schoolteacher.
‘Yes, boss, I got copies.’
Epstein smiled and nodded. ‘Fine, Tony. Continue.’
Scaduto glanced at Dwight and grinned, this time cockily, with pride, then turned back to Epstein. ‘Reasoning that the landing mechanisms of an experimental lunar landing module could have made the depressions in the ground, I contacted informants in NASA and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory to find out if they, or any of the fifteen local industrial firms working for them, had been conducting any experiments with lunar landing modules in the area. In each case, the answer was “No.” I then established that no helicopters or aircraft were in the area at the time of the sighting and that the direction of the winds ruled out the possibility that the object was a weather balloon.’
‘This sounds too good to be true,’ Epstein said, smiling distractedly, as if lost in his own thoughts. ‘We certainly appear to be talking about a real, physical object that landed and took off again.’
‘Well, then, digest *this* interesting piece of news,’ Scaduto said, no longer looking even remotely uncomfortable and instead getting into his stride. ‘Just before leaving Socorro I received a call from my set of eyes and ears at the ATIC, and he told me that Project Blue Book, even under the leadership of the sceptical Major Quantinilla, is going to list the case as a genuine unidentified: the only combination of landing, trace and occupant case so far listed in the Blue Book files.’
Epstein gave a soft whistle to express his surprise and pleasure.
‘At least they’re still doing *something*,’ Dwight said sardonically.

‘Now, now,’ Epstein responded soothingly, knowing how bitter Dwight felt about how he had been treated by the Air Force. ‘Go on, Tony. We’re listening.’

‘Regarding Project Blue Book’s involvement,’ Scaduto continued, ‘I found that the case had been examined by Dr Lincoln La Paz, who’d worked on the old Project Twinkle, and by NICAP’s Dr. J. Allen Hynek. The last named was there in his official capacity as consultant to the USAF. I also have it on the best of authority that Hynek has already pronounced it as, I quote, “one of the major UFO sightings in the history of the Air Force’s consideration of the subject.” That was the final clincher when it came to Major Quantinilla’s decision to list it in Project Blue Book’s files as the first known combination of UFO landing, trace and occupant case.’

‘Wonderful!’ Epstein exclaimed softly.

‘So what did you find out about the landing site?’ Dwight asked more pragmatically.

‘Examination of the landing site revealed that the diagonals of the quadrilateral formed by the four landing marks intersected almost exactly at right angles. I therefore asked for, and received, Hynek’s report, which contains an especially interesting notation.’

Scaduto opened the notebook he’d been holding in his lap, flipped a few pages over, then read aloud: ‘One theorem in geometry states that if the diagonals of a quadrilateral intersect at right angles, the midpoints of the side of the quadrilateral lie on the circumference of a circle...’ He glanced up from the notebook. ‘Here’s the important point,’ he said, then went back to his reading. ‘It is thus of considerable interest that the centre of the circle so formed on the Socorro landing site virtually coincided with the principal burn mark on the ground. Under certain circumstances the centre of gravity of the craft would have been directly over the centre of the circle, hence making the presence of the burn mark more significant.’ He closed the notebook and looked up again. ‘In other words, what Hynek is saying is that the indentations and burn marks on the ground clearly indicated a real, physical object of circular shape. It wasn’t a mirage or hallucination on the part of Deputy Marshal Zamora. That vehicle was real enough... and it was shaped like an upside-down saucer.’

‘And if the vehicle was real,’ Dwight said, ‘then so were its crewmembers.’

‘Exactly!’ Scaduto exclaimed with satisfaction.

‘This is sounding better every minute,’ Epstein said.

‘And it gets even better,’ Scaduto told him. ‘Get this... Checking with a receptionist in the Socorro County Building – a nice lady, incidentally, who saved me a night’s hotel bill – I learnt that by 7.20pm on the evening of the sighting CIA agent Jack Fuller and US Army Captain Richard T. Holder, the up-range commander of the White Sands Stallion Site, met in the Socorro County Building, where they proceeded to interrogate Zamora. In the course of that interrogation – according to the tapes heard by my nice lady and others – Byrnes told Zamora that it would be better if he did not – and I quote again: “publicly mention seeing the two small figures in white”
– unquote.’
‘Two small figures in white,’ Epstein repeated dreamily.
‘Correct.’
‘Not black?’ Dwight asked.
‘No. White.’
‘But they specifically told Zamora not to mention the figures seen standing beside the saucer-shaped object,’ Epstein said.
‘That’s right,’ Scaduto replied. ‘Which suggests that the figures in white coveralls were certainly there.’
‘Anything else?’
‘Yes.’ Scaduto was now visibly excited. ‘Jack Fuller then recommended that in future Zamora refuse to describe the insignia he had seen on the side of the vehicle to anyone other than official investigators.’
‘Insignia?’ Epstein asked, leaning forward to stare intently at his young researcher.
‘Yeah. There was an insignia on that aircraft. According to the report witnessed, notarised and filed in the Socorro County Building, it was red in colour and approximately one-and-a-half feet from top to bottom. Zamora sketched it for his report. According to his sketch, it was an inverted V, or a vertical arrow, with a line under it, vertical lines on each side, and a parabolic arc over the point of the arrow.’
‘Any idea what it represented?’
‘Some.’ Scaduto’s grin was now openly triumphant. ‘A computer scientist buddy of mine ran it through his data base and came up with the notion that it’s similar to a medieval Arabic sign for Venus. However, another friend, an aeronautical engineer, insisted that it’s confirmation that the UFO was a man-made vehicle.’
‘Man-made?’ Epstein echoed him. ‘I don’t think I can wear this.’

‘I think you might, boss.’
‘Okay, Tony, continue.’
‘In support of his claim, this buddy of mine showed me how, by moving and rotating the lines of the drawing, the acronyms “CIA” and “AD” could be formed, the latter representing the initials of Allen Dulles, present head of the CIA. My buddy also showed me that the parabolic arc above the arrow, or inverted V, could represent a stylised cross-section of the body of the flying saucer – or a pressure wave – while the arrow, or inverted V, with a line under it, could indicate that a vertical thruster is located centrally in the fuselage, or circular wing. Finally, he knocked me sideways by stating that the placing of the symbol on the side of the vehicle – just above the thruster orifice on its underside – could be a warning that the thruster is located there; while the use of red for the symbol could be a danger sign, just as it is with contemporary aircraft symbols.’
Scaduto straightened up in his chair, looking pleased with himself.
‘So where is this leading?’ Epstein asked in his quiet, patient manner.
‘The implication,’ Scaduto said, ‘is that the Socorro sighting was of a highly sophisticated, piloted, vertical-ascent-and-descent, man-made aircraft that had flown from, and returned to, somewhere in the White Sands Proving Ground.’
For a considerable period of time there was silence in the room, broken only by the soft drumming of Epstein’s fingers on the desk. Eventually he took a deep breath and said, ‘Man-made flying saucers?’
‘Yes. Constructed in the United States, most likely in the White Sands Proving Ground.’
‘But do you believe those flying saucers can account for all the sightings we’ve had since World War Two?’
‘No,’ Scaduto said. ‘But they sure as hell could account for the many stories of flying saucers being held in top-secret hangars in US Air Force bases.’
‘And the other ones? The technologically superior ones? The so-called mother ships?’
Scaduto shrugged. ‘I don’t know.’
‘Well,’ Epstein said after some thought, ‘although the APII has, up to now, carefully avoided all so-called “occupant” cases, in this instance, given Deputy Marshal Zamora’s reliability as a witness, and because Project Blue Book is listing the case as a genuine unidentified, I think we should – how shall I put it? – *liberalise* the organisation by including occupant cases in the

future. I myself will avoid the man-made flying saucer hypothesis, but if you gentlemen wish to pursue it, by all means do so. In the meantime, I think we should use the latest Socorro sighting as leverage to press again for Congressional hearings.'

'Good idea,' Dwight said.

Sitting behind his desk, wearing an English tweed jacket and grey pants, with striped shirt and tie, his hair still plentiful even if turning grey, as was his short, pointed beard, Dr Epstein looked older than his age. After massaging his forehead, he sighed and glanced from Scaduto to Dwight.

'Well, gentlemen, I guess that's it for the day. It's a lot for one day.'

'You want to join us for lunch?' Dwight asked him. 'I'm having a light lunch with Tony here, before catching the plane back to Dayton.'

Epstein glanced at the mass of papers on his desk, then raised and lowered his hands in a rabbinical gesture – or simply one of weariness. 'I can't. The Socorro incident has brought the work in and my desk, as you can see, is already overburdened. Besides, when I get tired I can't eat – and I certainly can't take a drink at lunchtime – so I'll take a rain check.'

'You're sure?'

'Yes, I'm sure.'

Dwight and Scaduto pushed their chairs back, then Dwight leaned over the desk to shake Epstein's hand. 'Until the next time.'

'Have a good lunch and a pleasant flight home,' Epstein said.

Scaduto just waved his hand and sauntered out of the office ahead of Dwight. Once on the sidewalk outside the building, they took a cab the short distance to Clyde's garden restaurant in M Street, Georgetown, near to where Bob Jackson had died, possibly murdered. Recalling that dreadful event, Dwight felt a spasm of grief combined with rage and decided that he needed a stiff drink. When they were seated in Clyde's, packed with the usual lunchtime crowd, a bedlam of genial conversation, Dwight ordered a large bourbon. Scaduto had beer. Throughout the lunch they talked non-stop about UFOs in general and the recent Socorro Incident in particular, growing more excited every minute. This did not help Dwight to forget that his good friend, Bob Jackson, had died, or more likely had been murdered, just a little farther along the street. No way in the world would Dwight ever believe that Bob had died of a heart attack.

Eventually, when they had finished the lunch, settled the check and were preparing to leave, Scaduto said: 'I'm telling you, Dwight, I still believe the

UFOs are manmade and probably originate from both Canadian and American top-secret establishments, notably in the White Sands Proving Ground.'

'I'm still not sure of that,' Dwight confessed, as they made their way out of the packed garden restaurant, through the indoors bar, then back into M Street.

'Don't forget,' Scaduto continued, unperturbed, as they stood on the busy sidewalk, observing the passers-by, many of them exuberant students from Georgetown University, 'that the Brits have already demonstrated a vertical-take-off aircraft using swivelling jet nozzles – the *Hawker P1127*. And laser-beam technology

– often included in UFO reports, though generally treated as pure science fiction – has been making incredible advances since its discovery four years ago by the Hughes Aircraft company in California. So the capabilities of the flying saucers reported are definitely moving into the area of the possible. The saucers *could* be man-made!'

'But some of the saucers are really so far advanced that I find it difficult to believe they could be man-made.' Dwight glanced automatically along M Street, towards Canal Road, and found himself trying to imagine what had happened to Bob Jackson that fateful night of his death. This in turn led him to another line of thought. 'Take Beth's experience, for instance. The one she recounted under hypnosis. That wasn't a dream – it was a real experience – and the technology suggested by her recollections had to be pretty stupendous. The beams of light from the small saucers somehow immobilised her car, then magically drew it into the mother ship. The beams of light from the mother ship disorientated her and temporarily paralysed her. Then, of course, when she was inside the mother ship, she was shown... *Earth and the stars*.'

'Yeah,' Tony said, softly, in wonder, 'she saw the damned stars!'

'That mother ship was out there in space,' Dwight continued. 'I can't imagine manmade aircraft, or spacecraft – flying saucers or other kinds – being capable of that, if based on the known technology.'

'Why not?' Scaduto responded. 'Our astronauts have been in space. Certain of our conventional aircraft can now reach the stratosphere. And according to Beth, the guy with the oddly expressionless face told her to warn you off the search for, quote, *man-made flying saucers*... And now this flying saucer sighting at Socorro, New Mexico, seems to prove conclusively that whatever

Deputy Marshal Zamora saw, it was certainly real enough and piloted by two small males wearing white coveralls... No planes in the air at the time, no weather balloons... It was *real*, Dwight. It left burn marks and depressions in the soil. It was *physical*... So where the hell did it come from?'

'I don't know,' Dwight confessed. 'I only know this... I'm frightened for Beth and Nichola. I'm even frightened for myself. So if I continue to work for Epstein, I've got to do it off the record and you've got to cover the more public sightings. You've got to cover *for me*.'

'No sweat,' Scaduto said.

The two men shook hands on the crowded sidewalk, then went their separate ways.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Stopping his car in the middle of the desert between Las Vegas and Nellis Air Force Base in the dead of night, Fuller lit a cigarette, inhaled gratefully, blew a cloud of smoke, and realised that he wasn't looking forward to this particular meeting with Wilson.

For the past year, ever since Wilson had called a meeting to angrily discuss the socalled Socorro Incident, when a USAF flying saucer, based on the *Kugelblitz I*, and its two-man crew had been spotted by Lonnie Zamora, Fuller had been having regular, mostly unpleasant meetings with Wilson, who had expressed his concern about the resurgence of public interest in UFOs generated by the Air Force's carelessness in letting one of their flying saucers from the White Sands Proving Ground be seen by a widely respected Deputy Marshal.

Indeed, the Socorro Incident of 1964 had become in the collective mind of the public the most fascinating UFO sighting since the original Socorro case of 1947. Approximately a year later, on June 12, 1965, one of Wilson's own, smaller flying saucers had crashed near Nellis AFB, right here in Las Vegas, Nevada. The saucer and dead crewmembers had been taken into a top-secret research laboratory on the base for examination. That was two weeks ago.

Demanding the release of the remains through Fuller, Wilson had been refused and, at a later meeting, had coldly told Fuller to inform his superiors at CIA Headquarters, Langley Field, Virginia, and in the White House and Pentagon, that he would be taking 'retaliatory' measures.

Knowing that Wilson was capable of inflicting great damage on the United States, Fuller had conveyed his message to the Pentagon.

Unfortunately, because of the speedy advances being made on their own flying saucer projects at Avro-Canada in Malton, Ontario, and at other top-secret research establishments in the White Sands Proving Ground and elsewhere in New Mexico and Arizona, the top brass of the Air Force were growing arrogant, believing that they could outflank Wilson, and so refused to hand over the invaluable debris of Wilson's vastly superior crashed saucer.

Now, as he glanced up and saw what appeared to be a star rapidly growing bigger in a black sky flooded with stars, Fuller was preparing to convey this second refusal to Wilson. He didn't look forward to it.

On the other hand, as he realised when he glanced back over his shoulder and saw the neon spires and minarets of Las Vegas soaring out of the vast desert darkness, this was where Elvis Presley had made his latest movie, *Love in Las Vegas*, also known as *Viva Las Vegas*. Fuller loved Elvis. Elvis was a great American. Fuller also loved Ann-Margret who, when she performed with Elvis in the recently released movie, had almost made Fuller cream his pants.

Amazing, he thought, the things I get to see doing this job. Here I am, metaphorically speaking, walking in the footsteps of Elvis and Ann-Margret. No wonder I love my country. Where else could you do this?

Turning away from the sparkling, high-rise, neon splendours of distant Las Vegas, he stuck his head out of the open window of the car and looked up again. The expanding star grew bigger, until it became dime-sized, then like a weather balloon, and finally, with startling speed, a large, saucer-shaped dark mass surrounded by a pulsating whitish glow. Seeming to widen as it descended, until it was immense, almost blotting out his entire view of the night sky, it stopped abruptly and hovered directly above him. Then, as if sensing the presence of his car below it – which in fact, as Fuller knew, it had – it glided slowly sideways, all 250 feet of it, stopped where it could not damage his car, then dropped lower again, its whitish glow dimming more with each second of its stately descent.

Eventually it settled gently on the ground, its nearest edge about fifty yards from Fuller's car. The whitish glow faded away, the lights flashing around its rim then blinked out, one after the other, in rapid sequence, and finally it was just a vast, silvery-grey, dome-shaped mass, eerily beautiful in moonlight.

Fuller was, of course, used to the sight of Wilson's extraordinary flying saucers (he rarely thought of them as UFOs) and, to a certain degree, now took them for granted. He therefore waited patiently for the seamless panel in the outer body to move outward and down, forming a doorway into the holding bay and a ramp that led from there to the ground. He did *not* wait patiently when the unmistakable form of Wilson was framed in that brilliant light, but instead slipped smartly out of the car and advanced to meet him.

The knowledge that he, Jack Fuller, the fearless, could be frightened of Wilson filled him with nausea. Nevertheless, approaching Wilson, meeting him halfway, Fuller was able to maintain his outward appearance of sardonic pragmatism.

'Mr Wilson!' he exclaimed softly, by way of greeting.

Wilson's hair was silvery-white but abundant. His face was lean and handsome, with piercing sky-blue eyes and slightly odd, almost immobile features. That, Fuller knew, was due to plastic surgery, though he wouldn't have dared mention the fact.

Wilson nodded. 'Fuller.' His face was as near to grim as his normally expressionless face would allow. 'Let's waste no time in idle conversation. You know why I'm here. Do I get my crashed saucer back or not?'

Fuller spread his hands in the air, indicating that he had come empty-handed. 'They said "No"?'

''Fraid so.'

'That was foolish of them.'

'The military mind can be foolish at times.'

'I do not require your facetiousness, Fuller.'

'Sorry.'

'What did they find in the wreckage?'

'Crewmembers. Very strange, I'm told. Someone used the word "cyborgs", which
was new to me at the time, though I've since been familiarised. All dead, of course.'

Wilson offered a chilling smile. There was a certain aspect to Fuller's bottomless pool of corruptibility, cynicism and blind patriotism that amused him. The crass stupidity of the majority of the human race, but in this case combined with low cunning, was exemplified in Fuller. The CIA agent, Wilson realised, had grandiose ideas about himself. Well, time would teach him...

‘You’re not too far from being a cyborg yourself,’ Wilson said in a rare demonstration of cynicism, which was, after all, a human attribute.
‘That sounds facetious, Mr Wilson.’
‘You don’t like to be put down. You have the need to prove yourself. These are admirable traits in a child, but you should have risen above them. Still, you are what you will be – which is not much at all – and I will therefore, willy nilly, be forced to accept this and deal with it. You’re a message boy and I treat you as such by asking one question: Your *superiors* said “No”?’
‘Yes, they said “No”.’
‘You *do* realise, I take it, that I could go into that Air Force base and take what I want without a problem.'
‘Without a short-term problem,’ Fuller replied, taking as much satisfaction as he could from this conversation, which wasn’t, in his view, all that much. ‘But in the long term it wouldn’t do you much good. By which I mean that the use of force would only draw attention to that secret hangar in the base. And the more – how shall I put it? – the more *unusual* the method of your assault, the more attention it would subsequently receive in the media. Which isn’t, if I may say so, exactly the kind of attention you want.’
‘What a clever man you are, Mr Fuller.’
‘Gee, thanks, Mr Wilson.’
Wilson ignored the nervous sarcasm. ‘Why do they want to keep my saucer and its dead crewmembers?’
‘Because your saucer is more advanced than their own and the nearest we’ve come to workable cyborgs are fairly basic Cybernetic Anthropomorphous Machine Systems, or CAMS.’
‘I’m surprised you could pronounce that.’
‘I have my moments.’
‘So they’re no longer satisfied with what I’ve already given them. They think they can *steal* my technology and, perhaps, catch up with me.’
‘I’m afraid that’s the case, Mr Wilson. It’s the nature of the beast to grow arrogant and turn on its master.’
Wilson seemed to sigh, though that was unlikely. ‘Well, I’m sorry to hear that, Mr Fuller, because I had hoped to avoid unpleasantness. Now, alas, I’m going to have to teach the White House and the Pentagon a lesson they won’t easily forget.’
Not being as stupid as his superiors when it came to an assessment of Wilson’s powers, Fuller had feared that this was how he would react – and

feared even more what he might do. ‘What lesson would that be, Mr Wilson?’

Again, when Wilson smiled, the effect was chilling. ‘I’m going to black out most of the East Coast of the United States. A *total* blackout, Mr Fuller. If, by the first week in August, I do not have my crashed saucer back, I will begin the process of turning out all the lights. I will do this gradually, bit by bit, to give you time to change your minds. But if, by November, you’re still holding my crashed saucer and dead cyborgs, every light on the east coast will go out.’

‘Every single light on the East Coast of America?’

‘Yes. Every single light. Now take that message back to your superiors and, if they still refuse my request, keep your eye on events during the first week of August. Goodnight, Mr Fuller.’

Fuller returned to his car and sat in it until the enormous, majestic flying saucer ascended vertically, then abruptly shrank to the size of a star and shot off to the east. Then, feeling chilled by Wilson’s warning, he drove straight back to Las Vegas airport and caught the first plane back to Washington DC.

When he had conveyed Wilson’s message to the White House and the Pentagon, via CIA Headquarters in Langley Field, Virginia, they refused to believe that Wilson could do what he was threatening. They all thought he was bluffing.

The following week, the first week in August, 1965, Fuller asked the Langley Field press-cutting department to send him reports on any unusual stories regarding power lines or electricity generators. In fact, even before the first cuttings had been received, he knew that Wilson’s game was starting when one of his CIA physicists, engaged in an intelligence study of the relationship between UFOs witnessed over power lines and subsequent, inexplicable power failures, submitted an unusual report.

During the first week of August, thousands of citizens in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado and neighbouring states witnessed one of the biggest UFO displays ever. Unidentified lights flew across the skies in formation, were tracked on radar, and played tag with civilian and Air Force aircraft. Reading the written reports of hundreds of witnesses, Fuller thought the descriptions of the lights were strikingly similar to those he had received about the Nazis’ World War II *Feuerballs*.

As Fuller subsequently found out from his daily perusal of the relevant press cuttings, this unexpected major display of UFOs ended abruptly a

week later.
During the evening of the first day in which the UFOs had *not* been seen, when in bed with the most recent of his nubile girlfriends – he liked them young these days – Fuller was shocked to receive a personal phone call from Wilson.
‘I didn’t know you had my home phone number,’ Fuller said, trying to hide his feeling of violation at close to midnight.
‘I have everything on you,’ Wilson replied, ‘including every last detail of the blonde creature lying beside you, just about legal age.’
Now almost sweating, wondering where the hell Wilson was speaking from and wondering just what he had seen of his frolics with the nubile, jailbait blonde, Fuller said, fighting to keep his voice steady, ‘So what do you want at this time of night?’
‘I want to know if the ambitious morons above you have seen enough and are willing to return my crashed saucer and its dead cyborgs.’
‘I’m really sorry to have to say this,’ Fuller replied, feeling even more sorry for himself, ‘but the ambitious morons above me are acting like just that – morons. They’re insisting that the recent UFO flap was purely accidental.’
‘Then they are truly moronic.’
‘Well,’ Fuller said, trying to recover his equilibrium and act cool for the benefit of the nubile blonde beauty stretched out beside him, looking seriously puzzled, ‘as they said, what you threatened didn’t actually happen: the lights didn’t go out.’
‘I told you I would give them a chance to change their minds before I went further.’
‘They thought you were bluffing.’
‘Then I’ll show them otherwise,’ Wilson said, ‘and I’ll do it in the middle of winter, to cause even more chaos.’
‘That’s three months away,’ Fuller reminded him.
‘I’m sure you can wait that long. Goodnight, Mr Fuller.’
Fuller carefully put his phone back in its cradle, rolled over to the blonde and slithered onto her naked, sweat-slicked body like a snake in a swamp. Attaining an instant erection, he slipped it into her and whispered, ‘How long do you think we can keep this up? Does three months sound good?’
The remark was, he soon realised, a very poor joke designed to quell the unexpected, uncustomary fear that was making his stomach churn. He knew the joke hadn’t worked when the fear, crawling through him like a ghostly,

malignant presence, made him lose his erection before he could properly use it.
This had never happened to him before, but then he'd never known fear before.
He would have to get used to it.

Three months later, on the night of November 9, 1965, hundreds of UFOs, most in the form of darting lights, were reported from Niagara, Syracuse, and Manhattan. That same night, all the lights went out – in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and a section of Canada. They went out over a total area of 80,000 square miles and a population of twenty-six million people. The biggest power cut in American history, it caused chaos and panic.

Even while this blanket of darkness was falling over the land – and was already being dubbed the Great Northeast Blackout – Fuller was on the phone at CIA headquarters in Langley Field, Virginia, trying to find out what had caused it. He learnt that the huge power grid that controlled all of the blacked-out areas – an interlocking network linking twenty-nine utility companies, with hundreds of automatic controls and locking devices – had always been considered to be invulnerable... yet the system *had* failed and the cause of the black-out couldn't be ascertained.

The only thing known for certain at this point in time was that the failure had occurred *somewhere* in the flow between the Niagara Falls generators and the Clay power sub-station, an automatic control unit through which the electric power flowed from Niagara to New York.

Shortly after Fuller had digested this report, he received a call from a CIA friend, Dick Lamont, at Andrews Air Force Base.
'There's a UFO connection,' Lamont said.
'What kind?'
'The first report of an unidentified,' Lamont told him, 'was made by the Deputy Aviation Commissioner of Syracuse, Robert C. Walsh, and several other witnesses. Just after the power failed at Syracuse, all of them saw what resembled a huge fireball *ascending* from a fairly low altitude near Hancock Airport. Approaching for landing at that time was flight instructor Weldon Ross and his passenger, computer technician James Brooding, both of whom saw the same object. At first they mistook it for a burning building on the ground – something corroborating the fact that the fireball was at low

altitude – but then they realised that it was something in the air... a single, round-shaped object about a hundred feet in diameter, later described in their formal report as a “flame-coloured globe”. And according to Ross’s calculations, that object was directly over the Clay power sub-station...’

No sooner had Fuller put the phone down than it rang again. This time it was Wilson.

‘Well?’ he asked softly.

‘I have to talk to the President,’ Wilson replied.

‘You do that,’ Wilson said.

A few hours later, at 3.30 in the morning, after his ‘emergency’ telephone conversation with President Lyndon B. Johnson, Fuller was landing by helicopter in the most heavily guarded area of Nellis AFB, Las Vegas, Nevada. Two crude coffins and a pile of large wooden crates had already been loaded onto a caravan of US Army trucks, which were surrounded by a ring of heavily armed troops. Fuller clambered into the back of a diplomatic limousine and told the driver to go. The limousine, which had tinted, bulletproof windows, led the convoy of trucks away from the floodlit hangar to a restricted airstrip at the northern edge of the base.

Clambering out of the limousine, Fuller glanced about him and noted that the whole area was surrounded by barbed wire and protected by more helmeted, armed troops. Satisfied with the security arrangements, he supervised the unloading of the two coffins and crates. When they were unloaded and forming one large, pyramidshaped heap in the middle of the airstrip, the armed soldiers were ordered into the trucks and driven back to camp, leaving Fuller alone with a high-ranking Air Force officer.

Not intimidated by high-ranking Air Force officers, Fuller lit a cigarette and smoked while he waited.

Eventually, one of Wilson’s mother ships descended silently, majestically, a great pyramid of steel cocooned in a white haze, its rainbow lights flashing rapidly around its circular rim, to settle just above the field at the far side of the runway. When it had landed, the lights flickered off, one after the other in quick sequence, the white haze disappeared, as if the light had been sucked back in through the porous metal of the saucer’s body, and then a large, formerly seamless panel moved outwards and down to form a doorway with a wide ramp leading from the holding bay of the saucer to the ground.

At first seen as no more than a sharp-edged silhouette in the dazzling light of

the holding bay, Wilson's assistant, Salvatore Fallaci, became recognisably human as he advanced down the ramp and approached Fuller, now just getting out of his limousine.

As Fuller noted instantly, Wilson was not present. Instead, Fallaci was surrounded by four creatures who could have been easily mistaken for aliens, or extraterrestrials, but were, as Fuller now knew, cyborgs surgically mutated from what had once been normal human beings: the small Ache Indians of Paraguay. Averaging five feet tall, sometimes even smaller, only occasionally taller, they'd had facial surgery to replace the nose, mouth and throat with metal-covered prosthetics. While this alone would have made them look bizarre, they were rendered even more 'alien' by their remotecontrolled metal hands, which were actually small CAMS of the kind used for seabed exploration.

The children of Frankenstein, Fuller thought. That's who I'm dealing with. That fucker Wilson is Frankenstein.

'Good evening, Mr Fuller,' Fallaci said.

'More like good morning,' Fuller responded.

Fallaci smiled. He had that Italian charm. 'Normal people keep normal hours,' he said, 'and are always boring.' He glanced at the trucks lined up behind Fuller. 'Is everything there, Mr Fuller? By which I mean the crashed saucer and its dead cyborgs. Those and every other single item you took into that hangar.'

'Every single item,' Fuller said. 'You're getting everything back.'

'It's good to know that above and beyond you, there are people with some common sense.'

'Go screw yourself,' Fuller said.

He had finally come to accept (and it hadn't been easy) that he was frightened of Wilson. He had never been frightened of anyone in his life – not until he met Wilson, who had always been icily polite and curiously civilised. Fuller was frightened of Wilson's steady blue gaze, of his absolute pragmatism, of the way he could look directly at you without blinking and reduce you to nothing. Wilson lacked normal feelings. He passed judgement, then acted. What he did was dictated by a logic so pure that it had to be inhuman.

Fuller accepted that. He didn't like it, but he understood it. Pragmatism was his own meat and potatoes - a man did what he had to do. That was Wilson. That was Fuller, also. In truth, he and Wilson were opposite sides of the

same coin.
You couldn't believe this shit coming down, but there it was on your plate. You either ate it or you starved to death. That was life in a nutshell. On the other hand, though Fuller patriotically ate this shit, he wasn't about to do so in front of Salvatore Fallaci. The former Mafioso was only Wilson's minion and as such could be used as an antidote to Fuller's fear and frustration. All the things that Fuller wanted to say to Wilson – but did not dare say – he could say to Fallaci.
'You hear me? I said, go screw yourself.'
'I'm not here to be insulted,' Fallaci said, 'so let's just do what we have to do. May I start?'
'What the fuck do you think?' Fuller responded, trying to obliterate his fear of Wilson by shitting on his assistant. 'We didn't come here at this hour to rock and roll. Take what you want and then leave.'
'I will do exactly that,' Fallaci said. 'Thank *you*, Mr Fuller.'
Using what appeared to be a miniature microphone strapped to his throat, Fallaci directed the hideous cyborgs, step by step, as they removed the crates containing the separate parts of the crashed flying saucer and the coffins containing the dead crew from the army trucks, then carried them up the ramp, into the dazzling holding bay of the mother ship. When this task was completed, the cyborgs also entered the mother ship, leaving only Fallaci outside, once more facing Fuller.
'You've shown sound sense,' Fallaci said to Fuller. 'Mr Wilson thanks you.'
'Don't mention it,' Fuller replied, trying to sound sardonic, though his stomach was churning with tension.
Fallaci grinned, turned away and walked up the ramp, into the mother ship. The ramp folded back in and the great saucer-shaped craft, again looking seamless, emitted a bass humming sound, gave off a magically pulsating whitish glowing, lifted gently off the ground, like a soap bubble floating on water, then ascended vertically to the heavens and eventually disappeared.
'Good God,' the high-ranking Air Force officer beside Fuller exclaimed softly, 'I don't believe my own eyes.'
'That's what those bastards are banking on,' Fuller responded. Then, defeated, but trying not to show it, he turned away and walked back across the dark, eerily silent airstrip.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Dwight had begun to feel that he had no real life – out there, where the real world was. He seemed to have spent the past decade indoors, pouring over reports of UFO sightings and UFO photographs, piecing this and that together, trying to make sense of what seemed senseless, hoping to find logic in his nightmares. The nightmares were, of course, based on what had happened not only to him, but also to Beth, and for that very reason he had been keeping a low profile with regard to his UFO researches. So low, indeed, that even Dr Epstein and Tony Scaduto of the APII had begun sending him letters, asking him what the hell he was doing.

Finally, in November 1966, a year after the Great Northeast Blackout, Dwight pulled himself out of that dark hole he was living in – not his home, but his bruised and frightened soul – to meet Epstein and Scaduto, who'd flown in from Washington DC, in a Chinese restaurant in Dayton, for lunch and a talk. With his hair and Vandyke beard now mostly grey, Epstein looked a lot older, but Scaduto, given the benefits of youth, hadn't changed that much and still wore his black-leather biker's gear. They made an unusual team.

'My feeling,' Epstein said as he turned his Singapore noodles expertly on his chopsticks, 'is that you've practically given up your UFO research. We're getting nothing back, Dwight.'

Dwight shrugged. 'I won't deny it. I *have* practically given up. Ever since that incident with Beth, I've been frightened for her and Nichola, so I decided to keep a low profile and not draw any attention to myself. What the hell! Why lie about it? I was so scared, I decided to drop out altogether, in the hope that those bastards, the men in black, or whoever, would forget us entirely.'

'Perfectly understandable,' Epstein said, nodding sympathetically. 'Had I been in your situation, I'd have been just as scared.'

'You probably *are* in his situation,' Scaduto said. 'You just don't know it yet. I mean, man, if you're running an organisation like the APII, those bastards are bound to be watching you.'

'But they've never bothered me,' Epstein replied.

'They have their own ways and reasons,' Dwight said. 'But living with the constant expectation of a visitation is just as bad as the visitation itself.'

'So nothing new to recount?'

'Only that Nichola's turned nineteen and is planning to marry.'

'Nineteen!' Scaduto exclaimed. 'I can hardly believe it. Makes me feel like

an old man.’
‘We age overnight,’ Epstein said gloomily, clearly thinking of himself, then he brightened up enough to ask: ‘So you’ve been involved in the arrangements for the wedding?’
‘Right,’ Dwight said.
‘And Beth... How has she been coping?’
‘You mean the forthcoming nuptials or her CE-Four experience?’
‘Both.’
‘She’s thrilled that Nichola’s getting married – she’s very romantic that way. I think it’s been a healthy distraction for her, regarding the other thing. It’s kept her mind off it.’
‘And what about the so-called “other thing” – the CE-Four experience?’
‘Since having her hypnotic treatments her headaches and nightmares have gone, but she’s gradually remembering the details of her abduction and now lives in fear of the men in black and the possibility of being abducted again. That, in a nutshell, is why I’ve virtually stopped working for you. It’s for Beth. I’m frightened for her. I think that what they did to her was a warning – and it’s one that I’m heeding.’
Indeed, just thinking about it made Dwight feel that a wall of darkness was closing in around him, even in daylight. You were there, in that dungeon of the mind, and you might never get out. That’s what they could do to you. Though who ‘they’ were, he still didn’t know.
‘I don’t mind admitting that we’re desperate to get you back to work,’ Epstein said. ‘A recent Gallup Poll has shown that approximately nine million Americans now believe they’ve seen a UFO. Our research supports that figure. To put it mildly, we’re being overwhelmed with reports. So we need all the help we can get.’
‘*Nine million?*’ Dwight asked, finding it hard to believe what he was hearing.
‘Yes. An astonishing figure, right? The Gallup Poll was undertaken in the wake of one of the most widely publicised events in the history of the UFO controversy: the furore over the Dexter and Hillsdale, Michigan, sightings that occurred eighteen months ago. Did you read about them?’
‘Yeah.’ Dwight recalled them only vaguely. ‘I remember reading about them and seeing some news items on TV. It was at a time when I couldn’t face anything about UFOs, so I guess I gave them a miss. I used to just turn my head away.’

‘You must’ve been in a fucking *bad* way,’ Scaduto said.
‘I was.’
‘May I refresh your memory?’ Epstein asked.
‘Sure. Go ahead.’
‘On March 20 last year, eighty-seven women students and a civil defence director at Hillsdale College, Michigan, saw a glowing, football-shaped object hovering over an empty swamp a few hundred yards from the women’s dorm. It repeatedly raced at, then retreated from, the dorm, dodged an airport beacon light, and flew back and forth for hours before disappearing. The next day, in Dexter, sixty-three miles away, five people, including two police officers, reported seeing a large, glowing object rising from a swampy area on a farm, hover for a few minutes at about a thousand feet, and then leave the area.’
‘An impressive set of witnesses,’ Scaduto said.
‘Quite so. And within a few days, nearly every newspaper in the country and all national TV news programmes were carrying reports on the sightings. This placed intense pressure on the Air Force to investigate the incidents.’
‘I remember that much,’ Dwight said, growing interested despite himself. ‘The head of Project Blue Book, Major Hector Quintanilla, sent Dr J. Allen Hynek to investigate the sightings.’
‘Right – and Hynek had to virtually fight his way through the reporters to get at the witnesses. Later, he stated that the entire region was gripped by near-hysteria. He did, however, manage to complete his investigation and afterwards held what was reported as being the largest press conference in the history of the Detroit Press Club.’
‘Hynek’s widely respected,’ Dwight said, ‘so where he goes, the press goes.’
‘Knows his stuff,’ Scaduto murmured.
‘He’s brought respectability to the subject,’ Epstein said, ‘and I’m grateful for that. Unfortunately, in this instance, he fell flat on his face.’
‘Oh?’ Dwight said. ‘How?’
‘He made the simple mistake of not thinking before he opened his mouth. With the news hounds all baying for an instant explanation for the sightings, he suggested – purely as a hypothesis – that they might have been caused by marsh gas.’
‘What the hell’s that?’ Scaduto, an urban man, asked.
‘It’s a phenomenon caused by the spontaneous ignition of decaying vegetation and it produces eerie, glowing lights.’

‘Thank you, professor.’
‘Anyway, the press latched onto the words “swamp gas” and had a field day making fun of them, with the ironic result that coverage of UFOs reached unprecedented levels during March and April – particularly regarding the DexterHillsdale sightings. So much so, in fact, that Weston E. Vivian, Democratic Congressman from Michigan, and Gerald Ford, House Republican minority leader, formally called for Congressional hearings.’
‘Oh, Christ, yes,’ Dwight said. ‘I remember it all now. But that’s about as far as I got. That’s when I stopped reading about it. And I started switching the TV off when the subject was raised. So what happened next?’
‘The House Armed Services Committee,’ Epstein said, ‘acted on Ford’s suggestion and on April 15 – for the first time in the history of the UFO controversy – Congress held an open hearing on the subject. When the hearings were completed, the Secretary of the Air Force, Harold D. Brown, directed the Air Force chief of staff to make arrangements for a special, independent, civilian team to investigate selected UFO sightings. Subsequently, on May 9, the Air Force announced that it was planning to contract with scientists for a full-scale UFO investigation.’
‘And last month,’ Scaduto interjected excitedly, ‘the Air Force announced that the University of Colorado had accepted the UFO study project and that Edward C. Condon would be in charge.’
‘Who’s Condon?’ Dwight asked, more intrigued every minute, feeling that he was coming back to life after being buried alive.
‘An internationally known physicist and former head of the National Bureau of Standards,’ Epstein told him.
‘Impressive,’ Dwight said.
‘Which is exactly why they picked that bastard,’ Scaduto said with surprising, unexpected bitterness.
‘Here’s the interesting part,’ Epstein said. ‘The part not included in the press reports.’
‘Go on,’ Dwight responded, leaning forward, as if drawn to Epstein by a magnet.
Epstein smiled slightly, knowing that he’d hooked Dwight again. ‘Dr James E. McDonald,’ he said, ‘a senior atmospheric physicist at the University of Arizona’s Department of Atmospheric Sciences and one of the nation’s leading scientific authorities on UFOs, had accidentally seen the *classified* version of the previous Robertson Panel report at Wright-Patterson AFB.

This led him to reveal, when speaking to members of the university's Department of Meteorology, that the CIA had ordered the Air Force to debunk UFOs. He had read this, he said, in the uncensored version of the Robertson Panel report.'

'Fucking A!' Scaduto exclaimed, looking happier.

'The news services picked up this story,' Epstein continued, 'and publicised it widely on the same day that the Air Force announced the establishment of the Condon Committee.'

'Condon was picked,' Scaduto added enthusiastically, 'because he's already shown he doesn't believe in UFOs. He's been tasked with helping the Air Force deny that they deliberately debunked UFO reports and to help them bury this subject once and for all. What say you, Dwight?'

'I say you're right,' Dwight said without thinking. 'And what we have to look into is...'

He stopped talking in mid-sentence, realising that he'd just committed himself again, despite his lingering doubts. When he saw the grins on the faces of Epstein and Scaduto, he couldn't help laughing.

'I don't believe it,' he said, when he had managed to contain himself. 'You pair of bastards came all the way from Washington DC just to seduce me into going back to work.'

'We sure did,' Epstein said.

'So are you in or out?' Scaduto asked.

'Count me in,' Dwight said.

The three of them raised their glasses in the air and tapped them together in a toast.

It was the last of their good days.

Chapter Forty

Sitting on his rocking chair on the veranda, overlooking the fenced-in compound, Ernst Stoll observed the arrival of Wilson's flying saucer with no great deal of pleasure. This time Wilson was coming in a medium-sized saucer, 150 feet wide, and carrying, so Ernst hoped, a 35-foot diameter, two-seater saucer with a cyborg pilot for his personal use. Ernst still had his own thoughts about that and they were making him nervous.

Indeed, as he watched the *Kugelblitz III* descending vertically over the steaming canopy of the rain forest, he was torn between his need to escape this filthy hole and his dread of what might happen if he tried. Over the past few months it had dawned on him that he had now been here for years -

nearly twenty years, in fact – and that there had been no indication that Wilson would ever let him leave. Ernst was rotting in this jungle; perhaps even losing his mind. With little stimulation, he could not stretch himself and was, he felt, becoming like a vegetable, blending in with the forest. So depleted was he that he could not even enjoy sex with his Ache comfort girls, let alone still be thrilled with the feeling of power that he had formerly received from running the compound like a merciless god. Now he wanted only to die in the Fatherland, preferably in Mannheim, where he had been born, and rest in the same soil that had taken his wife and children so many years ago.

Naturally he was nervous about telling Wilson this, but was determined to do so. A man could only take so much and he, Ernst Stoll, had had enough. He would plead for release.

As Wilson's saucer descended slowly, majestically, into the clearing, its familiar bass humming sound grew louder and became almost palpable, an odd vibration that shook Ernst's log-and-thatch house. Looking up, he saw the immense, spherical, deceptively seamless craft blocking out the tropical sky as it dropped lower. Still quite high up, the saucer was spinning rapidly on its own axis, except for the gyroscopically stabilised central fuselage. The rapid rotation of the circular outer wings slowed down as the saucer descended, creating violent currents of air that made loose grass, plants, soil and gravel swirl wildly, noisily, in the air, as if caught in the eye of a hurricane. As always, the native workers and captured Ache Indians were staring up in awe as the gigantic saucer descended, cocooned in a familiar whitish glow. This glow darkened to a more normal metallic grey when the saucer hovered just above ground level, bobbing gently like a cork in water, its thick hydraulic legs emerging from four points equidistant around its base, to embed themselves deeply in the muddy ground. The saucer bounced gently on the legs, but eventually settled and was still. Its rotating wings gradually slowed and then stopped altogether, as did the wildly swirling, artificial wind. Silence reigned for a moment.

As a panel in the concave base opened up to form a ramp leading down to the ground, Ernst rose from his rocking chair, stepped off the veranda, and advanced to meet Wilson. The latter emerged from the holding bay of the saucer, tall, slim, naturally elegant, white-haired, oddly handsome with the aid of plastic surgery, and with a psychic aura as cold as a block of ice. Ernst practically trembled with fear the instant he saw him.

Wilson did not offer his hand. He just nodded and said, ‘ *Guten tag*, Ernst. It is good to see you.’ Speaking German, he was inclined to become rather formal.
‘And good to see you, sir.’
‘You are well?’
‘Yes, sir, and you?’
‘I’m in excellent condition for my age, given all the medical and surgical aid I’ve had. You must try it yourself, Ernst.’
Ernst felt himself smiling nervously, without humour. ‘I don’t think I’m quite ready for that yet. Perhaps a few years from now.’
Even as Ernst was speaking, four of the hideous cyborgs, mutated from unfortunate Ache Indians, came down the ramp behind Wilson, looking even shorter than they were beside the Frankenstein who had created them. Ernst shuddered to see them.
‘As promised, I have brought your present,’ Wilson said, still speaking in formal German. ‘But let us have lunch first.’
‘Naturally. Yes, sir.’
Ernst led his lord and master back to the house where, on the veranda, which was pleasantly cool, they had what Wilson considered to be a major meal: fruit-and-nut cereal, with a glass of cold, very dry white wine. While partaking of the lunch, he expressed his concern that the Americans and Soviets were, ironically with his help, progressing technologically much faster than he had anticipated.
‘Since Lyndon B.Johnson was sworn in as President,’ he explained, ‘after the assassination of Kennedy, both the Americans and the Soviets have had men drifting outside their spacecraft; two separate US Gemini spacecraft have met in space and flown side-by-side only six to ten feet apart – an achievement requiring astonishing technical accuracy by their modest standards – the first space docking has been made by a US astronaut; and, finally, an unmanned US *Surveyor* spacecraft has soft-landed on the moon.’
‘Well, sir, you *did* help them with that,’ Stoll dared to remind him, ‘even if indirectly, with your supplies of scientific drawings and a great deal of highly advanced technology.’
Wilson nodded. ‘Yes. As part of that agreement I promised the Americans, through CIA agent Jack Fuller, that they would be the first to land a man on the moon. As always, I’d intended keeping that promise. However, the speed with which the Americans are advancing scientifically had made me feel that

I must hinder their progress, as well as American and Soviet progress in general. It's clear from my recent conversations with Jack Fuller that they're growing arrogant, believing that they can somehow catch up with my achievements, which is why I arranged last year's Great Northeast Blackout as a warning to them. After that, they cooled down for a while, but already they're growing arrogant again, so clearly they need another lesson.'

'What have you planned?'

'I've learnt through one of my brain-implanted spies located within NASA that they have a rehearsal for another Apollo launch planned for January 27 next year. The same man – one of NASA's top scientists – will therefore ensure that the spacecraft malfunctions and bursts into flames, killing all three of the astronauts on board. A couple of months later – I believe this will be April – when cosmonaut Vladimir Komarov is due to orbit the Earth in a Soyuz spacecraft, we'll attack it with a laser-beam weapon fired by one of our saucers. We'll make the spacecraft crash, killing Komarov. The combined deaths of the cosmonaut and three astronauts will almost certainly cause consternation and result in delays in the space race between the Americans and the Soviets. I think this will work, yes?'

'I think so,' Ernst said.

When the meal was finished, Ernst made his usual report to Wilson, telling him about the negative or positive aspects of the capturing and holding of the Ache Indians and any difficulties presented by his dealings with Paraguay's officials, most of whom were as corrupt as their master, President Stroessner. Eventually, when he'd completed his report, he glanced across the compound with its mud-and-thatch shacks, goats, chickens, mosquitoes, piles of shit and everything else he detested here, including the native workers, men and women alike, and suddenly blurted out that twenty years here was too much.

'I desperately want to return to Germany,' he said finally.

'Why do you wish to return?' Wilson asked.

'It is the Fatherland...'

'It is not,' Wilson interjected in his remote, unemotional way. 'The Fatherland died with the ending of the war. What you want is no more.'

'Still, my wife and children died there. Everything I had was there. I have been here for twenty years and I'm growing old and I yearn for the past. Please, sir, let me go.'

'I didn't realise you were so sentimental,' Wilson said with a smile that did

not reach his eyes and held no warmth at all – a smile as cold as the grave.
‘Nor did I,’ Ernst replied, ‘but I am. It’s a sign that I’m growing old.’
‘I’m sorry, Ernst,’ Wilson said, showing no sign of emotion whatsoever, ‘but I’m afraid I cannot say “Yes” to that just yet. We still need you here. You are doing invaluable work here. Rest assured that it will end in a year or two, and then we can consider this matter again. But why Germany? There’s nothing left for you there. In a year or two, when your work here is finished, you can return to Antarctica for medical and surgical rejuvenation. When that’s completed, we will find you something suitable to do there; or, if you prefer, somewhere else. But not Germany. There you could still be picked up as a war criminal and forced to stand trial. We cannot risk that.’
‘That’s the problem,’ Ernst said, feeling even more desperate, knowing that he was going to lose out again to Wilson. ‘It’s not just a matter of getting back to Germany. The truth is that I don’t think I can stand it here much longer. This place is gradually driving me crazy. I have to get out.’
‘You simply need a short break now and then,’ Wilson insisted in his coldblooded, icily pragmatic way. ‘You don’t need to return to Germany. You just need to get out of here more often, perhaps visit Asuncion.’
‘The journey is too difficult,’ Ernst said, aware that he sounded pathetic, his heart sinking with the knowledge that Wilson was going to be unbending about letting him leave here for good. ‘And besides, it’s too dangerous. This compound is in the middle of the rain forest, the jungle, and the only way out is by river. That makes short breaks difficult.’
‘Which is precisely why I’ve brought you a gift, Ernst. A small, two-seater flying saucer with a programmed, totally obedient cyborg pilot. Come and look.’
Even as they stood up and walked down the steps of the veranda, a 35-foot wide flying saucer emerged slowly, gracefully, from the holding bay of its mother ship, barely inches above the floor, but certainly floating in mid-air, and advanced over the clearing, watched silently by the awed, terrified natives and Ache Indians. Made, like all of the flying saucers, from minutely porous magnesium orthosilicate and electrically charged, it was surrounded by that familiar whitish glow, caused by the ionisation of the surrounding atmosphere. With its outer rings rotating around its fixed, cupola-shaped central fuselage, it looked like a giant spinning top. Unlike the bigger flying saucers, however, it had a visible Perspex dome not much larger than the cockpit of a small airplane.

Standing beside Wilson in the clearing as the saucer advanced towards him, Ernst could see, in that cramped, two-seater pilot's cabin, the silhouetted figure of what had to be the cyborg pilot. A lump came to his throat as the saucer settled gently on the ground, its four legs extending to embed themselves in the mud. He was recalling how desperately, when an aeronautical student, first at the Institute of Technology in Munich, then in the rocket technology classes of Professor Karl Emil Becker at the University of Berlin, he had wanted to join the VfR, or Spaceship Travel Club, in the company of Werner von Braun, Rudolph Nebel, Willy Ley, and Hermann Oberth, to build rockets that would soar to the heavens. That dream had been crushed when he joined the SS and, eventually, came under the influence of the almost inhuman Wilson, who, for the past twenty years, had kept him imprisoned between helpless reverence and dread. Now, when he studied the small flying saucer, he saw the means of his escape and, formulating it, was filled with terror at the thought of what Wilson might do if he failed and was captured and brought back. Thinking about the possibilities, Ernst had to wipe sweat from his brow and control his body's trembling.

'Beautiful!' he exclaimed softly, referring to the small flying saucer now resting in the middle of the clearing, dwarfed by the immense *Kugelblitz III*.

'Yours,' Wilson responded. 'It's not stratospheric, but its range is virtually limitless and you can use it for lengthy journeys at an altitude that will keep you well above normal airplanes, out of the range of radar, thus out of sight. Use it to give yourself some short breaks, away from this place. You'll feel better then.'

'It's been so long,' Ernst said hesitantly. 'I don't know how to fly any more. Certainly not...'

'The cyborg pilot will do the flying for you when the saucer isn't on autopilot. One of our first fully functioning cyborgs. Look!' Speaking into the pinhead microphone strapped to his throat, Wilson ordered the pilot out. With the saucer being so small, the pilot emerged rather like the pilot of a normal airplane: by opening the domeshaped Perspex hood, which split into two parts, then clambering out and simply slithering down the sloping side to the ground. When, in this instance, the pilot had done so, Ernst looked at him in horrified amazement.

He was both horrified and amazed because he actually recognised what was left of the original Marlon Clarke, the farmer abducted in Socorro, New

Mexico, in 1947 and flown to the Antarctic after witnessing the crash of a flying saucer. Clarke had been turned into a hideous man/machine hybrid, or cyborg. His head had been severed, kept in cold storage, then transplanted to the body of a small, headless Ache Indian. Ernst was surprised that he still recognised Clarke, because there was so little of his original face to be seen. His skull was covered in the stereotaxic skullcap that kept electrodes implanted in his head at all times; and his lower face – ears, nose, mouth and jaw – had been replaced with an ugly metal prosthetic. The hands of the original Ache Indian had been sliced off and replaced with what would have looked to most people like vicious metal claws, though they were, as Ernst knew, CAMS, capable of highly sophisticated movements. Clarke looked like a monster.

‘Plastic artificial heart,’ Wilson explained. ‘Bionic audio transmitters to replace the mechanism of the inner ear. Plastic arteries. Synthetic bones in both legs and the lower arms attached to the CAMS. The latter, while looking like metal claws from afar, actually have fingertips of polyvinylidene fluoride, which detects alternations in pressure and delivers the appropriate impulses to the nerve ends. Brain-implantations, of course, and programmed for absolute obedience – you speak, he obeys. Here... strap this pinhead microphone to your throat.’

Ernst took the tiny microphone, wrapped the strap around his throat, and clipped it shut with the microphone resting on his Adam’s apple.

‘Now identify yourself,’ Wilson said. ‘Tell the cyborg your name,’

‘My name is Ernst Stoll.’

‘Good,’ Wilson said. ‘That’s all he needs to know. He now knows the sound of your voice and will react automatically to it with total obedience.’

‘Amazing,’ Ernst said, feeling hope even in his despair, seeing light where only darkness had reigned.

‘He’s a gift for your years of devotion to duty,’ Wilson said. ‘Use him well. Now I must be going.’

Nodding at Ernst, since he rarely shook hands these days, Wilson went back up the ramp of the bigger saucer, followed by his four cyborg guards. Once they were all inside, the ramp closed and the saucer lifted slightly off the ground. Shortly after it had lifted off, and while it was still hovering above the ground, its hydraulic legs were drawn back into the base of the central body and the panels closed so precisely that the joins around them could not be seen. Then the saucer rose vertically, slowly, to just above the canopy of

the soaring trees, hovered there for a few seconds, then abruptly shot upward, shrank rapidly, and then disappeared.

The cyborg pilot, Marlon Clarke, was standing silently in front of the small flying saucer, practically brain-dead until activated by instructions from Ernst. Both terrified and exhilarated by what he was contemplating, Ernst hurried back into his log-andthatch house, to have a strong drink of schnapps, which helped give him the courage he needed to do what he was planning.

Sitting there on the sofa in the middle of the room, he looked around at the photos that showed his own history: a golden-haired child in the courtyard of his parents' imposing neo-Gothic house in Mannheim; a handsome youth sitting with a pretty young blonde-haired lady, Ingrid, later to be his wife, at an outside table of the Kranzler Café on the Kurfurstendamm in Berlin; clambering out of an army car at Stadelheim Prison, Berlin, in his black SS uniform; posing, already cynical, in the same uniform outside Gestapo Headquarters in the Prinz Albrechstrasse with friends Brandt and Ritter, both killed in the war; celebrating with those same two friends and some whores at the Schauspielhaus in 1937, all drunk and holding up steins of beer; wrapped in a greatcoat covered with snow as he hammered swastikas on steel poles into the hardened snow of Neu Schwabenland, Antarctica, in 1938, claiming the territory for the Third Reich; already ageing and embittered when with the flying saucer team – Wilson, Rudolph Schriever, Klaus Habermohl and Otto Miethe – outside the hangar of the research centre at Kummersdorf, located at the other side of the firing range separating it from Werner von Braun's Rocket Research Institute; twice with the Reichfuhrer, Heinrich Himmler – first looking icily controlled in the SS headquarters in Berlin, then, six years later, looking deranged in the sanatorium of Dr Gebhardt at Hohenlychen; finally, with generals Nebe and Kammler in the great underground complex of the Nordhausen Central Works in Kahla in the Harz Mountains. And, of course, the women, his *few* women... That erotic dancer, Brigitte, from the White Mouse in the Franzosischestrasse; the sensual, treacherous Jew bitch, Kryzstina Kosilewsky, from Cracow; and, coming last, but in a framed picture hung on the wall directly facing his desk, his wife, Ingrid, and their two children, Ula and Alfred, taken two weeks before they died in an Allied air-raid...

Ernst almost choked up then, overwhelmed with emotion, recalling that more human aspect of himself before the war, Wilson and this hellish jungle

had eaten up the last of his soul. He was going mad here – he had to get out – and now he was going to attempt to do just that while he had the chance.
He was terrified of what would happen if he failed, but he still had to try it.
Hurriedly packing a shoulder bag with his basic necessities, the photos he had just been studying and, most important, the great deal of cash he had gathered over the years from various transactions with General Stroessner's corrupt officials, he left the house for what he hoped would be the last time. Crossing the muddy compound to the small flying saucer, he glanced with distaste at the log-and-thatch cabins, the bamboo cages packed with imprisoned Ache Indians, the native men and women kneeling around camp fires, the mangy dogs and chickens and goats, all dwarfed by the soaring trees, and was thrilled at the prospect of never seeing them again. Approaching the cyborg pilot, who stared at him with almost dead eyes from between the stereotaxic skullcap and the metal lower-face prosthetic – a truly awful sight – he ordered him, by speaking with the aid of his throat-microphone, to climb up into the saucer. When the cyborg had done so, Ernst followed him, clambering up the gently sloping side and slipping into the pilot's domed cockpit. When both he and the cyborg were strapped into their seats, their shoulders almost touching, which made Ernst feel uneasy, he told the cyborg to take off, ascend as high as possible, then turn towards the sea and set the autopilot for West Germany.
Obeying, the cyborg activated the saucer and soon, after the cockpit covering had closed automatically, its circular wings were rotating and taking on the whitish glow of ionisation. The saucer lifted off gently, swayed just above the ground, then ascended in a stately manner until it was above the canopy of the trees. So excited he could scarcely breathe, Ernst managed to take one last look at the fenced-in compound, now practically lost in the jungle far below, then the saucer suddenly shot off at startling speed, flying smoothly above the vast, river-divided, densely forested landscape of Paraguay.
Ernst never even got to see the sea.
No sooner had the small saucer gone into horizontal flight than Wilson's much bigger saucer, the mother ship, appeared magically out of nowhere to sit on its tail. Horrified to see this, Ernst was also terrified when Wilson's voice came out of amplifier vents in the cyborg's steel facial prosthetic, saying in German, 'I know what you're attempting, Ernst, and I'm disappointed in you. You will now be punished for your betrayal. I'm sorry

to have to do this.’
Instantly, the cyborg let out a demented, hideously human wailing that cut right through Ernst. Smoke poured out from behind the featureless lower-face metal prosthetic, followed by showering sparks. Then, as the cyborg continued its ghastly, ear-splitting wailing, the steel prosthetic blew off, revealing the surgically shredded bone and flesh around the removed mouth, jaw and nose, with blood squirting out and splashing over Ernst. Even as Ernst looked on, aghast, too shocked to think clearly, the cyborg’s head started smoking beneath the skullcap and he made an odd rattling sound – the sound of Marlon Clarke dying – then slumped sideways in his seat, clearly dead.
As Ernst stared at the cyborg, mesmerised by shock, the saucer flipped over and started spinning rapidly towards the earth. Rendered dizzy and nauseous by the spinning, almost deafened by the hammering of wind against the canopy, not knowing which way was up and which down, Ernst was further punished by the sight of the dead cyborg rocking wildly in his seat with blood still spewing from the mess of exposed bone and flesh where the metal prosthetic had been. He then saw the spinning jungle rushing up towards him and knew that the saucer was about to crash.
Ernst screamed in terror.
Miraculously, just before the spinning saucer struck the canopy of the trees, Wilson’s saucer appeared above it. A pyramid of brilliant light, some kind of force field, beaming out of the base of Wilson’s enormous craft, enveloped Ernst’s spinning machine and appeared to place it under control again.
Held in that pyramid of light, Ernst’s saucer, though now the right way up, raced on a descending trajectory towards the jungle – heading back, as Ernst realised with dread, in the general direction of his compound by the river.
The jungle rushed up towards him. The pyramid of light blinked out, then Wilson’s saucer ascended abruptly, vertically, and appeared to dissolve into the blazing sun. Ernst covered his face with his arms as he crashed into the jungle.
He survived... almost certainly because of Wilson. Though the saucer crashed, it levelled out before doing so, smashing through the trees, hitting the ground the right way up, and then sliding through the soft mud until it finally came to a shuddering halt.
Though battered, bruised, badly cut and bleeding, the shocked Ernst still managed to crawl out of the saucer, which was mangled but still in one

piece. Standing upright, but almost falling again from dizziness, he wiped blood from his eyes and eventually managed to orientate himself. After taking a final look backwards at the crashed saucer, which already was being covered in falling leaves, he began what he knew would be a long, hellish march back to the compound.

He had been punished and sentenced. Now he knew that he would be imprisoned in the compound for the rest of his days.

His hell was right here on Earth.

Chapter Forty-One

In October, 1967, Dwight paid a visit to Dr Epstein and Scaduto in the APII headquarters in Washington DC, where he was introduced to two new members of the organisation, both physicists: a handsome, sardonic young man named Robert Stanford – whom Epstein always addressed simply as 'Stanford' – and the relatively famous Dr Irving Jacobs. Stanford was pretty flashy, dressed like a Californian in a sky-blue open-necked shirt, denims held up with a fancy leather belt, and a windcheater jacket. Dr Jacobs, older and wiser, was wearing a standard grey suit, shirt and tie, and well polished black shoes.

'Though he looks like he comes from Malibu,' Epstein said, 'Stanford actually hails from right here, in Washington DC.'

'McLean, Virginia, to be precise,' Stanford explained with a shit-ass grin.

'Dr Jacobs, on the other hand, hails from Camelback Hill, Phoenix, Arizona, and has been kind enough to fly here just for this meeting. They've both signed up to work for the APII and I'm pleased they're with us.'

'It's swell to have you aboard,' Dwight said, shaking the hands of both men in turn.

'Still got me to deal with, though,' Scaduto said, looking even cockier than Stanford. 'Bet *that* gives you headaches!'

'Headaches from bastards like you I can enjoy,' Dwight replied. 'At least they keep me awake.'

'Ain't he just the nicest sonofabitch?' Scaduto asked rhetorically. 'Say, hey, let's get cookin'!'

Though he didn't know anything about the flashy, self-confident Stanford, Dwight had read about Dr Irving Jacobs in a wide variety of scientific journals and knew that apart from working for NASA and the American Nuclear Society, he was seriously interested in the UFO phenomenon. That he was joining the APII was therefore good news, since his reputation in so-

called ‘serious’ areas could only enhance the credibility of the organisation.
‘Okay, gentlemen,’ Epstein said, indicating the chairs around his desk with an airy wave of his right hand, ‘now that my good friends Dwight Randall and Tony Scaduto have had their regular little get-together skirmish, please take a seat and let’s talk.’ When they were all seated, lighting up cigarettes and sipping water or coffee, he said to Dr Jacobs: ‘As you still work for NASA, Irving, can I begin by saying how sorry I was to read about the deaths of those three astronauts, Grisson, Chaffee and White, in the flash fire that swept through their Apollo spacecraft last January. It must have been a real blow to you.’
‘It’s been a bad year for the space programme in general,’ Jacobs replied. ‘I mean, apart from our three unfortunate astronauts, there was the death of the Soviet cosmonaut, Vladimir Komarov, when his Soyuz spacecraft crashed after coming out of orbit. In neither case – NASA or the Soviet Union – did anyone have a clue as to exactly what happened. God knows, it was certainly a year of disasters that set the space programme back a good deal and could threaten its funding.’
‘Which won’t help the APII,’ Stanford said. ‘Because when public interest wanes in the space programme – which it always does when funding is cut and there’s no media attention fixed on it – it also wanes regarding UFOs. Alas, some people – indeed millions of goddamned people – tend to link the two together. That’s one of life’s unfortunate facts.’
‘The man’s a philosopher,’ Scaduto said.
‘You read me loud and clear,’ Stanford replied. ‘I have a big mouth.’
‘On the other hand,’ Scaduto said, ‘to get back to the subject of this meeting, it *has* been a wonderful year for UFO sightings.’
‘In what way?’ Jacobs asked.
‘Biggest goddamned UFO flap since the mid-1950s, including the great March concentration from Montana to Maryland.’
‘I was out of the country then,’ Jacobs said. ‘I *did* read a little about it, but can’t remember too much. I was in Paris, France, where the government is seriously considering the setting up of a UFO investigations programme, but their newspapers don’t write much about this country.’
‘No, the Frogs wouldn’t,’ Stanford said.
‘Literally hundreds of witnesses reported seeing UFOs,’ Scaduto said. ‘And there were more UFOs reported from as far apart as Saigon, Vietnam, and Brixham, England. Most intriguing was a large, saucer-shaped object

photographed clearly over Calgary, Alberta. However, the most widely publicised UFO-related incident was the one about a horse called Snippy, found gutted in a surgical manner, with fifteen unexplainable exhaust marks in the soil around the carcass.'

'Fascinating.' That was Epstein. 'The Snippy case has reminded the UFO community that over the past few years there's been an increasing number of similar incidents, when animals, including whole herds of cattle, were killed and robbed of their limbs and internal organs with what appears to be unusually precise, surgical skill.'

'That's one of my specialities,' Stanford said, adjusting his big-buckled belt and looking, with his flashy clothes and matinée-idol handsomeness, not remotely like the very bright physicist that he was. 'I mean, what have we got here? We've got animals being killed, sliced, and gutted where they stand with a precision that can only be surgical – not the handiwork of other, scavenging animals. I say it has to be done by extraterrestrials.'

'Why?' Dr Jacobs asked.

'They want the body parts and internal organs for research purposes,' Stanford replied without hesitation. 'Some kind of medical or surgical research. Find out how we work, right? I mean, find out how our bodies function.'

'But why so many parts?' Dwight asked.

'That's the million-dollar question,' Stanford said.

Dwight was just about to respond when Scaduto indicated with a slight shake of his head that he should say nothing more on the subject. Wondering what Scaduto was up to, Dwight went back to more mundane matters, mainly checking the facts and figures regarding recent UFO sightings in his particular area of Dayton, Ohio.

'And how's Beth?' Epstein asked him when he had finished with his summary.

'She's improving, but never too settled,' Dwight replied, plunging instantly, helplessly, into a well of fearful memories. 'She still has nightmares, but at least, for the time being, there are no visits from men in black, either real or imagined.'

'You have to be brave, Dwight.'

'No,' Dwight replied. '*Beth* has to be brave. I can only offer support.'

'She's a strong woman.'

'Yes, I think so.'

‘Well,’ Epstein said, obviously uncomfortable with the subject and raising his hands inquiringly in the air, ‘anything else to discuss or do we call it a day?’
‘No more from me,’ Scaduto said.
‘You?’ Epstein asked of Dwight.
‘Not from me,’ Dwight replied.
‘Anything you two want to ask?’ Epstein said to Stanford and Jacobs.
‘Not really,’ Stanford said. ‘It’ll take me about a month to check through these APII reports, but once I’ve done it, I’ll get back to you with my assessment and recommendations.’
‘Robert and Irving,’ Epstein explained, ‘have been taken on to do a long-term projection based on the flight patterns of UFOs, assessing frequency, direction of approach and retreat, and any other facts that will give us an indication of where they come from. We now have a pretty broad knowledge of their technical abilities and extraordinary flight characteristics; what we don’t know is exactly *what* they are and where they originate. Stanford and Dr Jacobs are going to try to come up with a pattern by analysing every single report in the APII files, going all the way back to 1947. Any help that you two... ’ here he nodded at Dwight and Scaduto... ‘can give will be greatly appreciated.’
‘Just give me a call,’ Dwight said.
‘Likewise, guys,’ Scaduto added.
‘Well, that just about wraps it up,’ Epstein said. ‘Are you two lunching, as usual?’
‘Yep,’ Dwight replied. ‘And as usual, you’re going to refuse to join us.’
‘I’m afraid so.’ Epstein spread his hands in that oddly rabbinical manner. ‘I have a desk piled with work and a lot of business still to cover with Dr Jacobs and Stanford here, so if you’ll excuse us...’
‘We come all the way to Washington DC to be thrown out of his goddamned office,’ Scaduto said, grinning. ‘On the other hand, a nice lunch and a couple of drinks... Are you ready, Dwight?’
‘I’m your man,’ Dwight said.
They both stood up, shook hands with Robert Stanford and Dr. Irving Jacobs, then left the office.

Soon after, they were having their traditional lunch in Clyde’s in Georgetown, which Dwight had once enjoyed, but which now always reminded him of the mysterious death of his best friend, Bob Jackson. For

that reason, if no other, the lunches were not as enjoyable as they had once been, though they were always informative.

'Have you mentioned your man-made UFO theory to Epstein yet?' Dwight asked of Scaduto when the meal was finished and they were having a final beer.

'Nope.'

'Why not?'

'He's a wonderful researcher, but he believes implicitly in the extraterrestrial hypothesis and I think he'd believe that any work I did in that particular direction would be a waste of the organisation's time and money. So, you know, I don't mention it.'

'Maybe you should.'

'Hey, hold on there, friend. I get *paid* by the APII. Don't wanna lose my income, don't you know?'

'But you still believe in it, right?'

'Fucking A. That's why we're here.'

'I was under the impression, possibly mistaken, that this was just our traditional Georgetown lunch, though I *did* catch your warning glance back in Epstein's office. What was that all about?'

'Get this. One of my buddies in the NICAP recently informed me that the members of the board of governors of that organisation – our lively rival – had managed to run down one of the CIA agents who'd been transferred – how shall I put it? – *out of harm's way*, after the so-called "Woman from Maine" affair. The agent, who'd been transferred to London before being eased out of the service, was naturally feeling embittered and so was willing to talk off the record, which eventually he did, during a meeting in the Drake hotel in New York.'

'A meeting with you?'

'Shit, yes.'

'Okay. Sorry. Continue.'

'Well, according to this agent, one of his assignments in the CIA was to undergo specialised training in the Duke University's parapsychology lab, a sensorydeprivation establishment at Princetown, and the psychology department at McGill University in Canada. The purpose of all this was to open his mind, a highly responsive one, to mental telepathy, sightless vision, and psychokinesis.'

'You want me to ask, "Why?" I can tell.'

Scaduto grinned. ‘The reason – and I think you’ve already guessed – is that the Russians were already employing agents with such skills for espionage purposes.’
‘That’s only a rumour. Unsubstantiated.’
‘Bullshit. It’s an established fact and you know it. You know damned well that the Parapsychology Lab of the University of Leningrad has been neck-deep in this shit for years.’
Dwight grinned and raised his hands in a pleading manner. ‘Lord forgive me for my mendacity. Okay, please get on with it.’
‘So this guy,’ Scaduto continued, ‘after a year of training at both Duke and McGill’s parapsychology labs, found that he could, like Ted Serios, cause photographs to appear on a film by merely *concentrating on* the camera. A year after his training, in 1959, he was working successfully with US Naval Intelligence and having successful shore-to-ship telepathic communications with an atomic submarine, the US *Nautilus*. And the same year, when the press exposed the *Nautilus* experiments, he was transferred back to Washington to work with – wait for it...’
‘The female psychic from Maine.’
‘Right!’
‘So he managed to make contact?’
‘No. At least, not straight away. During his first session, in the presence of the female psychic, he failed to make contact. At the second session, however, in that CIA office in Washington DC, when the woman wasn’t present, he went into a trance and made contact with... *someone*.’
‘Stop tormenting me, Tony.’
Scaduto’s grin was now like that of a Cheshire cat. ‘Well, like the woman from Maine, he was scribbling down automatically what it was he was hearing in his trance state. However, he never found out what he wrote, because before he snapped out of his trance, one of the CIA agents present at the session spirited the message out of the office.’
‘So they didn’t want him to know who he’d been in communication with.’
‘Correct. And when he finally awakened from his trance state, he found everyone at the window, all excitedly scanning the sky over Capitol Hill, where the UFO had been.’ Scaduto paused, grinned, and said, ‘You want to hear the rest?’
‘You’re a natural-born actor, Tony. Just get on with it, please.’
‘Well, you know, this guy is intrigued, right?’

‘Right.’
‘But he’s also annoyed because his notes have been taken from him. So later he has a clandestine meeting with one of his colleagues, who’d been present at the trance session, and asks him if the UFO had been real. His colleague, being drunk and careless with his Irish lip, confesses that it had been, that it was part of a top-secret government project, and that one of the crew on board had been ESP-trained.’
‘So the so-called “Woman from Maine” had picked up his thoughts by accident, like someone tuning into a foreign wavelength.’
‘Exactly.’
‘Well, I’ll be damned.’
‘But that wasn’t all,’ Scaduto continued excitedly. ‘According to my drunken colleague – who couldn’t stop talking once he’d started – the UFOs reported to have landed at Cannon AFB, Deerwood Nike Base and, apparently, Holloman AFB, were for real... but they weren’t extraterrestrial.’
‘Man-made.’
‘Right. The products of highly secret activity between the Canadian and United States governments.’
‘We’re back to the Avrocar, which was bullshit. I need another beer, Tony.’
‘To hell with the beer. Just listen. These aircraft or flying saucers – call them what you will – in no way resemble the aborted projects that were leaked to, then shown to, the media, us poor shitheads included. No, they were highly advanced flying saucers of pretty remarkable capability – and there were a total of about twelve in existence.’
‘Only twelve?’ Dwight asked sceptically, thinking of the extraordinary number of sightings over the years.
‘Yeah,’ Scaduto confirmed. ‘According to my man, his colleague had been seconded to Royal Canadian Air Force Intelligence, where he was tasked with implementing internal security on the flying saucer project. There he discovered that the project had been run jointly by the Canadian government, the US Air Force and Navy, and a few high-ranking Army officers from the Pentagon. Those bastards had managed to maintain secrecy by locating the underground production plants in the deserted regions of southern Canada, between British Columbia and Alberta; by ensuring that the production of the numerous components of the saucers was distributed between hundreds of different, international companies, none of whom could have guessed what the individual components were for; by undertaking the more

specialised research in the top-secret military installations of the White Sands Proving Ground at Alamogordo, New Mexico, and similar establishments all over Canada; and, finally, by deliberately confusing the press and public with a continuous stream of ambiguous leaks and misleading statements.'

'In other words...'

'They're real flying saucers, they're being constructed in Canada, and they're being tested and flown from top-secret American military bases.'

'Do you really think this could be true?' Dwight asked.

'It sounds crazy, I know,' Scaduto replied, 'but I'd like to find out. You want to come with me?'

'I want to go back to Beth,' Dwight said.

'Love prevails,' Scaduto said, grinning again. He led Dwight out of the bar and stood beside him on the crowded pavement of M Street. 'You'll come with me,' he said confidently. 'I *know* you will. Because you have to find out. You simply have to. You've gone through so much by now, you won't be able to ignore the one opportunity you have of learning the truth. That's the hook in your throat, my friend. Adios. I'll call you.'

He walked off along the sidewalk as Dwight stood there, almost dazed, recalling what his friend had said and accepting the truth of it. Dwight just had to find out.

Chapter Forty-Two

In the early hours of February 26, 1968, Wilson was set down in a field outside McLean, Virginia, by one of his flying saucers and driven from there in a limousine ordered up by Jack Fuller to the Hay Adams hotel, conveniently overlooking Lafayette Park and the White House. When he checked into the hotel, he did so under the name of Mr Aldridge. The real Mr Aldridge was a US citizen who had been abducted many years before, surgically terminated, and used as spare parts for the ongoing cyborg programme. Wilson therefore had all of the unfortunate Mr Aldridge's papers, with his own picture replacing the original in Aldridge's passport. The purpose of the visit was to discuss the ongoing activities of the widely publicised Condon Committee. This he did with Jack Fuller over a light lunch in the Tudor dining room of the hotel.

'My so-called Great Northeast Blackout appears to have had the desired effect,' Wilson said. 'The Condon Committee being set up, as it were, by you and your friends at Langley Field.'

‘Always pleased to oblige,’ Fuller replied sardonically, hiding the fear he always felt when in Wilson’s presence. ‘I have to admit that the blackout certainly convinced everyone that your technology is still vastly superior to ours.’

‘So they’re now willing to play the game my way.’

‘Yes. And the Condon Committee, backed by us, is our way of showing you we mean it.’

This was not strictly true and both of them knew it. The Condon Committee merely represented another defeat for the US in its cat-and-mouse game with Wilson – they had been warned and had taken heed – but sooner or later they would try to foil him again; then, if they failed, he would punish them... and so it went on.

‘I notice that Condon, soon after establishing the committee, started making it perfectly clear that he had little patience with the UFO hypothesis. Was that your doing also?’

‘Yeah. Condon also deliberately showed a partiality to obvious crank claims and cases that serious UFO investigators had already dismissed as hoaxes. Eventually he made it clear that he was intent on proving the whole idea of UFOs as nonsense. All that for you, Wilson.’

‘But there’s a thorn in our side,’ Wilson said. ‘This Dr James E. McDonald.’

Fuller sighed. McDonald was a senior atmospheric physicist at the University of Arizona’s Department of Atmospheric Sciences who had been interested in the UFO phenomenon for years. He was now one of the country’s leading authorities on the subject and strongly outspoken in his criticism of the Air Force and the CIA.

‘I’m afraid so. McDonald isn’t afraid of ridicule and he’s got a hell of a lot of energy. In fact, his individual research into UFOs has already far outstripped that of all other researchers, save perhaps J. Allen Hynek and Dr Epstein.’

‘How did McDonald get into it?’

‘About two years ago, in March, 1966, he obtained the National Academy of Science’s approval for a discreet, one-man study of UFOs. But when he heard of the Air Force plans to contract a UFO study to a university, he declined to use the support of the NAS and instead used personal finance. That way he was able to investigate scores of sightings and interview hundreds of witnesses. Thrilled by his success, he then launched a crusade to alert the scientific community to the seriousness of the problem. He also

took on the Air Force, repeatedly attacking it for its lack of scientific investigation and its pronouncements designed to soothe the public. Finally, he attacked us, the CIA, for our involvement in the Robertson Panel report.'
'A real trouble-maker,' Wilson said.
'Yep. And there's worse to come.'
'I am all ears.'
'In August, 1966, the Condon Committee co-ordinator, Robert Low, chosen especially by me and my colleagues, wrote a memorandum to the University of Colorado's administrators, expressing his lack of belief in UFOs. For this reason, Low suggested, the Condon Committee's real objective should be a public relations exercise in which the trick would be – and I quote – "to describe the project so that, to the public, it would appear to be a totally objective study, but, to the scientific community, would present the image of a group of nonbelievers trying their best to be objective, but having an almost zero expectation of finding a saucer".'
'And how did they recommend that this be accomplished?'
'To place the emphasis on the psychology and sociology of persons and groups who report seeing UFOs, rather than on the non-existent UFOs themselves.'
'In other words, place the persons and groups reporting UFOs in the firing line of humiliation and ridicule.'
'Correct. However, Dr McDonald has recently managed to get his hands on that old report – which shows clearly that the Condon Committee was formed simply to discredit the UFO phenomenon. This has led to a scientific scandal, the firing of a couple of the leading members of the committee, and, even worse, a Congressional hearing to begin this July.'
'Never mind the findings of the Congressional hearing,' Wilson said. 'No matter what conclusion they come to, just make sure that the committee recommends the final, complete closure of Project Blue Book. As for McDonald, I think I should clip his wings in the fullness of time.'
'You do that,' Fuller said.
He was trying to be flippant, but when he stared at the icy-blue, penetrating gaze of the silvery-haired Wilson, he knew that he was faced with pitiless intelligence. Wilson had cast off all normal emotions as being superfluous to his requirements; now he lived with a logic so rigorous it had made him inhuman. Fuller thought of Wilson as a mutant. Though born and bred right here in America, he was a true alien being.

‘So what about Dr Epstein and our other friends at the APII? What have they been up to?’
‘Epstein has brought in two new men – Robert Stanford and Irving Jacobs, both physicists, who between them have produced a thick, detailed report showing that most of the more advanced flying saucers, and certainly the bigger ones, fly on a north-south course – in other words, towards Antarctica.’
‘That’s too close for comfort.’
‘Right. And the publication of that report has led to a whole spate of articles about holes in the Poles and hidden UFO bases – just like your own, in fact. Luckily, most of them were of the more fanciful variety and we’ve used that as the basis for a continuing programme of disinformation. I mean, the more outrageous the theory, the quicker we’ll use it. So the APII report, while fairly accurate, is being buried in a whole heap of ridiculous stories.’
‘Nevertheless, if they picked up on that, we better watch them closely.’
‘They’ve picked up on something even more dangerous: the possibility that the flying saucers are man-made.’
Even Wilson, who rarely registered emotion, looked a little surprised. ‘Epstein?’
‘No. Epstein still supports the extraterrestrial hypothesis. It’s the other two: Dwight Randall and, especially, that troublesome kid, Tony Scaduto. He’s obsessed with the notion. Indeed, he’s taken himself up to Canada and is living there temporarily, in Malton, Ontario, to check out the Avro-Canada plant. He has a good nose, that one, and tenacity, so he might have to go.’
‘You’re keeping him under observation?’
‘Of course.’
‘Good. Keep me informed of what he and Dwight Randall are up to. Is there anything else?’
‘No, that just about wraps it up.’
‘Then good day, Mr Fuller.’
Fuller pushed his chair back and walked out of the restaurant, slightly cheered by the thought that Wilson would at least be picking up the tab. This was all he could hope for.

Chapter Forty-Three

Scaduto dropped in on Dwight in November, 1968, two days after Richard Nixon had been elected as the 37th President of the United States. Having spent almost a year working as a barman in Malton, Ontario, which

had enabled him to make a living while he sounded out the clients about the jobs they were doing in the local AvroCanada Aircraft company, he was keen to pass on what he had learnt to Dwight.

‘I can’t believe I’m back in God’s country,’ he began when he and Dwight had settled in the living room, in front of an open fire, with a couple of beers. ‘I feel like I’ve been in the fucking wilderness. Nice to be back in the real world at last.’

‘Hardly God’s country any more,’ Dwight said. ‘At least, not this year. Think of it... One of our spy planes seized by North Koreans, one of our nuclear bombers crashing in Greenland, the most shameful war in our history going on in Vietnam, Martin Luther King assassinated, black riots in most major cities, Bobby Kennedy assassinated, the police indulging in an orgy of Nazi-style violence at the Chicago convention, and now we’ve got a President that no-one would buy a used car from. God’s country no more, I fear.’

‘Stop being so pessimistic,’ Scaduto said cheerfully, wiping beer from his lips with the back of his hand. ‘Next month, I guarantee it, we’ll have three American astronauts orbiting the moon in the Apollo 8 spacecraft. They might even find a few UFOs up there. I can’t wait to find out.’

‘So did you see any UFOs in Ontario?’

‘Not quite, but I got close. See, I got me a job as a barman in Malton, near the Avro-Canada plant, and plying the guys from the factory with drinks I picked up enough idle talk to convince me that Avro had continued to work on saucer-shaped jet aircraft long after the public unveiling of that useless piece of shit, the Avrocar. At the same time, in my spare time, I drove around a lot of southern Canada, between British Columbia and Alberta, and found a lot of top-security research plants and aircraft factories. And those places, man, they’re hidden in the forested hills and couldn’t be seen from the air even if you had a giant telescope. Real dense forest up there in Alberta.’

‘Well, we *did* know that before, Tony.’

‘Nice to be reminded, though.’

‘True enough. So what else did you find out?’

‘When I was moving around the area, socialising wherever I could, I became bosom pals with a test pilot, Frank Lomax, who’d once worked for a Canadian-US company involved in the design and construction of highly advanced saucer-shaped aircraft; some piloted and as large as regular

aircraft, others only two or three feet in diameter, remote-controlled, and being mass-produced. Both prototypes reportedly based on captured World War Two German designs.'
'What makes you think he was telling the truth?'
'The production plant for the saucers was located in a densely forested, mountainous region that protected it from the eyes of the commercial airline pilots. But Frank, who now runs a private flight-training school just outside Alberta, knows the tricky flight path that takes you over the test grounds for the saucers, and he agreed to fly me over them, in the hope of seeing a parked saucer. Unfortunately, he agreed to do this just after I'd booked my return flight to Washington DC, but I'm going back eventually to take him up on his offer. I want you to come with me.'
Though instantly excited by the thought, Dwight found himself saying automatically, 'I'm frightened of drawing attention to Beth or myself. Particularly as Beth's been plagued again by nightmares about the men in black. I wouldn't want anyone to know I was doing that – spying on those aircraft companies in Canada.'
'I guarantee that Frank won't mention your name to anyone and that all references to the flight booking will be in my name. I don't have a wife and kids, so I'll take my chances.'
'I don't think I can refuse this offer, Tony, but I'll have to ask Beth. She's in a pretty bad way at the moment and has begged me to stay out of the UFO controversy.'
'But you'll ask her?'
'Yeah.'
'When?'
'I can tell you're keen. I might as well get it over and done with, so I'll ask her this evening over dinner. Did you want to stay, by the way?'
'Nope. Not if you're gonna have your little talk with Beth. Don't think I wanna see or hear that.'
'You're pretty damned cynical about marriage, aren't you?'
'That's 'cause I'm not married.' Scaduto handed Dwight an address card. 'Here's the hotel I'm staying at in Dayton. Give me a call when you know either way.'
'I'll do that,' Dwight promised.
Scaduto stood up, finished off his beer, then went into the kitchen-diner to call out a slightly nervous goodbye to Beth. Though she had nothing

personal against him – and, indeed, had once found him amusing – she now disliked seeing him here, because she knew he was bringing news about UFOs and, almost certainly, trying to persuade Dwight to return to UFO work, which she no longer wanted him to do.

In the event, Dwight didn't have to wait until dinnertime to broach the subject, as Beth, the instant Scaduto had departed, came out of the kitchen, drying her hands on a towel and looking grim. She was still an attractive woman, but she looked worn down by nervous tension. 'So what did he want?'

Not knowing how to state it gently, Dwight went for the blunt approach, though he tried to make it sound more casual than it was. 'He just wants me to make a trip with him to Alberta, Canada, then fly over some forested area where we think there may be man-made flying saucer construction plants.'

The casual sound didn't work. Beth's face turned pale with barely suppressed fury. 'You promised, Dwight. You said...'

Dwight cut her short by holding up his hand. 'I won't go if I don't have your permission, but Tony *did* insist that my name won't be mentioned with regard to the flight and the aircraft will be rented in his name. Besides which, I can't see how we would attract much attention by simply flying a chartered plane over the mountains. Lots of tourists do it.'

'You're looking for UFO bases!' Beth snapped vehemently.

'From an airplane, Beth. Not on the ground.'

'I don't give a damn. If they see the plane, they're liable to come up and blow you out of the sky. Who knows? And I don't want to be left alone here. You *know* that. *I'm scared!*'

'You can surely spend a mere couple of days with Nichola. She...'

'Never mind Nichola! I don't want you to go. I'll be worried for you and for myself and even for Nichola. Honestly, Dwight,' she continued, then made an accusation that she had often made during the early years of their marriage. 'I sometimes think you're more concerned with UFOs than you are with me. Well, damn it, go if you want to, but don't expect me to sanction it.'

With that she turned away and stomped back into the kitchen. Dwight followed her in and placed his arms around her. 'It's okay,' he said, hoping to hide his acute disappointment. 'I won't go. I guess I just didn't think.'

When she turned into his arms, smiling, he was reminded of how lovely she had been when they first married and how, despite the still barely perceptible

lines of middle age, she had retained that beauty. Touched, he kissed her lightly on the lips and patted her rump.
‘Still pleasantly firm,’ he said.
She had started to cry and now wiped tears from her eyes. ‘You’d have found that out sooner if you’d touched it more often,’ she said. ‘A woman gets to miss certain things.’
‘Well, I guess I’m not as young as I used to be.’
‘Young enough. If you can’t manage everything, a little touch here and there can work wonders.'
‘I’ll bear that in mind.’
‘At least you still know how to kiss.’
‘It’s like learning to swim: once learnt, it’s never forgotten.’
‘Then plant another one on me, then get out of here and let me get on with the dinner. Nichola’s coming to join us.’
‘Terrific,’ Dwight said.
After kissing her again, then patting her rump once more, he returned to the living room. He realised instantly, however, that he was extremely depressed at losing the possibility of actually seeing a man-made flying saucer on the ground. More than that: he felt crushed. Though he hadn’t been drinking seriously since the days when he was separated from Beth and on an alcoholic binge, he now poured himself a tall, consoling bourbon, hoping to drink it before Beth came back into the living room. Unfortunately, at that moment, Nichola, now twenty-one years old, married, and four months pregnant, opened the front door and walked in, coming for dinner.
She saw the glass of bourbon in Dwight’s hand before he could set it down. Still blonde and as pretty as a picture, she frowned disapprovingly.
‘What’s that, Dad?’
‘Only an aperitif.’
‘You only have the odd beer these days, Dad, and even then only with meals or when with friends.’ She took her coat off and threw it carelessly over the back of the sofa. ‘So what’s the occasion?’
‘No occasion. I just felt like it. Your husband has one of these every evening before dinner, so why do I need a special occasion?’
Nichola’s husband, Larry Fisher, was eight years her senior and working as a civilian engineer with the military aviation development branch of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. A decent, good-humoured man, he had a fondness for cigars and his glass of bourbon every evening before dinner. Apart from

that, he had no drinking problem, so Nichola didn't mind. She clearly did, however, feel troubled to see her father drinking bourbon again – and, worse, before dinner. 'Larry's never had a drinking problem in his life,' Dwight's stern daughter said, 'but you did.'
'Only once, sweetheart.'
'Once was enough to make you a wreck and force Mom to leave you for a few years. Here, give me that.' She took the bourbon from Dwight, then sat on the sofa, where she crossed her shapely legs, deliberately had a sip of the bourbon, and said, 'So what's happened to make you reach for a drink?'
'I just wanted to give you an excuse for having one,' Dwight replied, unable to resist the gentle sarcasm.
Nichola smiled. 'I have one every evening with Larry. It slips down real easy.'
'My boozing daughter.'
'So why did I have to stop you from boozing like your loving daughter?'
'He wants to go chasing after UFOs,' Beth told her, entering the room from the kitchen at that moment, 'and I won't let him.'
'How do you mean, chasing UFOs? Dad's been doing that for years.'
When Dwight told her, preferring to do it himself, Nichola said, 'You mean there's a real chance you could solve this mystery once and for all? I mean, resolve this business that's been tormenting you for years?'
'Yes,' Dwight said. 'If we can find those saucers on the ground, the game's up.' 'And you can stop feeling that you're being driven crazy by things you don't understand?'
'Yeah, Nichola, right.'
Nichola turned to her mother. 'Then I think you should let him do it, Mom.'
'*What*?' Beth was shocked.
'I think you should let him do it,' Nichola insisted. 'If a simple flight over the mountains of Alberta is going to end years of confusion and fear, then obviously you should let Dad take it and pray that he returns with what he needs to let him feel at peace with himself. Otherwise, if you tell him he can't go...' She held up the glass of bourbon and tapped it deliberately with her fingertips... 'He'll be back on this. So let the man go.'
'You don't understand, Nichola. It could be dangerous. It could draw attention to him, and then all that dreadful... *business* will start again. I don't think I could bear that.'
'You'll be able to bear it if you know that the pain could end pretty soon...

End for all time.’
‘It’s dangerous.’
‘But worth the risk. He goes to Canada with Scaduto, he charters an airplane, and a couple of days later, if things turn out okay – and that’s the chance we’ve got to take
– he’s back here and we’re all home and dry, with the whole damn business exposed for good. No more mysteries. No hauntings. No visits from men in black. For God’s sake, Mom, he’s been trying to solve this mystery since 1947, so you can’t possibly make him stop now. He’d certainly go back on the bottle and might even go crazy. So let him take this chance, Mom. Let him leap this final hurdle. Besides, the odds on something happening to him – like being blown out of the sky by a flying saucer – are pretty damned slim.’
‘At the very least, he could end up in prison,’ Beth said, now clutching at straws.
‘You’re imprisoning him with your fear,’ Nichola told her, ‘and that isn’t right.’
Taken aback by her daughter’s maturity and bluntness, but also proud of her, Beth said, 'All right, okay, you win. I just can’t bear the thought of being...’
‘Alone here.’ Nichola finished the sentence for her. ‘But you don’t have to be. You can come and stay with Larry and me in Springfield until Dad returns. You can even have a bourbon every evening, which is more than *he’ll* get. So are we agreed, folks?’
‘Yes,’ Beth said.
‘Thanks,’ Dwight said.
Deeply moved and certainly proud, like Beth, of his daughter, he kissed both of his women on the cheek, then he picked up the phone and spoke to Scaduto in his hotel in Dayton.
‘When do we leave?’ he asked.

Chapter Forty-Four

On the commercial airline flight to Calgary, Alberta, Scaduto drank a hell of a lot and became pretty drunk. When Dwight commented on this, Scaduto said, ‘You know this is gonna sound crazy – particularly with what you and Beth have been through – but now I’ve begun to feel – definitely, absolutely – that I’m being watched, though I can’t put my finger on exactly how. No men in black or black limousines, yet I’m being observed some way, I’m sure. I don’t know if it’s real or just goddamned paranoia, but that’s

what I feel. And so I find myself drinking, trying to deaden it, trying to say, “Go away!”.’

Glancing through the window of the airplane, Dwight saw a sea of deeply shadowed white clouds and, below, great swathes of forested hills. It looked desolate down there.

‘I’ve got to confess,’ he said, ‘that while out of deference to Beth’s fear that I’d bring attention to myself I was reducing my UFO activities, I was intrigued by the revelation that the US-Canadian saucers had been based on World War Two designs. Ever since you told me that I’ve been spending most of my time holed up in libraries
– even wrote to England’s Imperial War Museum and corresponded with German and American UFOlogists about the subject. So naturally I was pretty astonished to learn that it was true.’

‘You proved it?’
‘Yeah.’
Scaduto sipped more bourbon, looking excited. ‘So what did you find?’ Though he now knew most of it off by heart, Dwight automatically glanced at his

notes to ensure that he made no mistakes.
‘According to official reports, Allied aircraft during World War Two were harassed by UFOs – mostly in the shape of balls of fire – from as far back as 1944.
Shortly after the war, in the summer of 1946, the more familiar types of UFOs, most
cigar-shaped, swarmed across Scandinavia, seemingly coming from the general
direction of the Soviet Union. The conclusion at the Pentagon was that German
scientists, seized by the Russians at Peenemunde, where the V-2 rocket had been
developed, were constructing advanced weapons for the Soviets and that the unidentified, so-called *missiles* were being launched from the rocket test site of
Peenemunde, which was then in the Russian-occupied zone of Germany. This
suspicion became stronger when the British, who’d also seized and taken back to

Britain a wealth of Germany's top-secret scientific and weapons-research material,
announced that the Germans had been working since 1941 on extraordinary
aeronautical projects and on processes to release atomic energy. Included in the
former was a – this is a straight quote from the documents – "remotely controlled,
pilotless aircraft and a device that could be controlled at a considerable distance by
another aircraft" – unquote.'
'Which would account for the balls of fire,' Scaduto said.
'Right. Anyway, faced with this, and thinking of the Soviet so-called *missiles*,
possibly more balls of fire, that had been seen over Scandinavia, there was a sudden
British-Canadian-US alliance to beat the Soviets in the race to follow through the
German designs and complete their extraordinary aeronautical projects.'
'Which gets us to the man-made flying saucers,' Scaduto interjected with growing
excitement.
'Yes. It's true that what they were attempting to build in the underground plants in
Canada right after the war – with British and US back-up – was a machine with the
remarkable capabilities of the ones suggested in the incomplete German material.
They wouldn't achieve that goal for another twenty years, but the first, fairly crude
versions of their saucers were successfully tested over the Canadian border on June
21, 1947: a total of five disc-shaped aircraft, two of them piloted and approximately
fifty feet in diameter, the remaining three remote-controlled by the pilots flying
nearby, these three a mere three to six feet in diameter. Those particular flying

saucers could reach an altitude of approximately seven thousand feet, could hover uncertainly in the air, and had a horizontal flight speed of about six hundred miles an hour.'

'That test flight,' Scaduto said, 'could account for the Harold Dahl sighting of the same day.'

'Right,' Dwight said. 'But it was what happened *after* that test flight that really got the ball rolling. On June 24, three days after the first successful test flights of the five Canadian-US saucers, a total of nine highly sophisticated, *unknown* saucers flew down over the Canadian underground plants, hovered there for about twenty minutes, shot off toward the Cascades, where reportedly they circled the test area; returned, circled the plant for another twenty minutes, then shot off at incredible speed. From that day on – the day, incidentally, of the famous Kenneth Arnold sighting – those flying saucers, and others, returned again and again... and eventually spread out across the whole world.'

'Holy shit!' Scaduto whispered melodramatically, as if frightened of being overheard, then he finished his drink as the airplane came in to land at Calgary. 'So where the hell do the *others* come from?'

'That's the million-dollar question,' Dwight said, 'and it keeps me awake at night.'

A few minutes later, the airplane landed. Once they had disembarked and passed through Customs and baggage inspection, Scaduto's friend, the pilot Hank Lomax, met them in the arrival's lounge. Lomax was a short, feisty character with fiery red hair and a good-humoured face mottled by a combination of sunshine and booze. He was wearing a logger's red-and-black checkered shirt, oil-smeared blue denims, and buckled black-leather

boots. After being introduced to Dwight, he led both of them from the airport terminal to his old Ford car parked outside.

‘We’re going straight to my flight-training school on the outskirts of town,’ he explained when they were being driven by him out of the airport. ‘From there we’ll fly out in my Piper *Tri-Pacer* to the region you want. You being an old buddy, Tony, you don’t even have to charter it. You just pay for the gas used and we’re quits. I’m doing this for my own amusement. Which means, of course, that you don’t have to charter the airplane and there’ll be no record of either of you having passed through my flight-school. Now do you love me or not?’

‘I love you,’ Scaduto said. ‘Never mind that you’re an ugly bastard - I just love the hell out of you.’

‘Don’t make me blush,’ Lomax said.

As they were driven up ever deeper into the spectacular, forest-covered hills, Scaduto glanced around him and said, ‘Just look at those goddamned hills and peaks. Easy to hide *lots* of things up here! Hell, man, you could hide a whole fucking town.’

‘Just wait till we get in my Piper,’ Lomax told him. ‘Then you’ll really see something. We’ll be heading for British Columbia and that’s one wild place.’ During the drive he told them about some of the people he had worked with at the Avro-Canada plant in Malton, Ontario. ‘A surprising number were Germans,’ he said. ‘I remember that much. And one of them in particular, Otto Miethe, claimed to have worked on a programme called “Projekt Saucer” in Nazi Germany. Jesus, man, I could hardly believe it: there we were, working for the sons of bitches we’d fought in France and Germany. Anyway, that’s exactly what we were working on: saucershaped jet aircraft with circular, rotating wings and the pilot’s cabin fixed in the middle, based on those old Nazi designs. They weren’t as advanced as some of the flying saucers you read about, but they were definitely based on the German designs and more advanced than the original German prototypes. The smallest ones, about three feet wide, were really remote-controlled probing devices that could also be used to block radar and cause other malfunctions in any aircraft they flew near. You could control ‘em from the ground or from another aircraft in flight; and they certainly resembled balls of fire when in the air. The larger ones came in different sizes and were all piloted. When I left, the largest was about seventy-five feet in diameter, but I know they had plans for an even larger one.’

‘Who ran this company?’
‘It was part of the A. V. Roe company, later called Avro-Canada, but it was backed by the British, Canadian and US governments, and guarded like a military camp. You had to sign a top-secret clause to work there, with imprisonment as just one of the many punishments listed if you broke the secrecy, even after leaving the company. I’m taking one hell of a chance with you guys, I can tell you, but what the hell!’
‘And other companies like it were, or are, scattered all over British Columbia and Alberta.’
‘Right. See, what they’d do to really keep their projects secret and help them with disinformation, was, they’d use a company like A. V. Roe – the main plant in Malton, Ontario – as a front. When something leaked out about what they were doing, or when there was a public outcry, they’d call a press conference and show the reporters and politicians a piece of shit like the Avrocar. Meanwhile, they’d have another plant, run by A. V. Roe or some other big company, but listed as a legitimate experimental aircraft company. That one would do the real flying saucer construction work in a location hidden well away from view – like the one I’m going to show you today. Every couple of years, they’d formally close the factory down, listing it as bankrupt, when in actual fact they were simply moving the programme to a new, hidden location. That way, though they couldn’t hide the plants *completely* from prying eyes, they were all over the place, opening and closing down again, and that made them almost impossible to trace. For instance, this plant I’m taking you to, you can bet your balls it’ll be gone if you come back in a year’s time. That’s how they operate.’
‘Neat,’ Dwight said, forced to admire the diabolical cleverness of the faceless men who had made his life a torment.
A few minutes later they reached Lomax’s flight-training school located just north of Calgary. There, they squeezed into his four-seater Piper *Tri-Pacer* and then took off immediately, heading across Alberta, flying above the spectacular plateau that fell down from the Rocky Mountains to eventually form the southern part of the boundary with British Columbia. Though not personally flying the airplane, Dwight almost had a lump in his throat, being reminded of his early days, when he had been a bombardier and radar operator, flying to India, China, and the Pacific with the original B-29 wing; then as a navigator with an Air Force Reserve Troop Carrier Wing. Those days were long gone now.

‘Hey, what did you think of the results of last July’s Congressional hearings on the Condon Committee?’ Lomax asked Dwight, having to shout against the noise of the wind and the airplane’s engine. ‘I read that they’d resulted in a resolve to form a proper, official UFO enquiry.’

Lomax was referring to the end result of the notorious Low Memorandum, which brought heavy criticism down on the head of Edward C. Condon and his committee, most of it insisting that the committee’s work had been inept or, more likely, a snow job for the Air Force or the CIA, designed specifically to kill off the UFO controversy. So loud was the furore that Congressman J. Edward Roush delivered a speech on the House floor, saying that the Low Memorandum and a subsequent *Look* article by journalist John Fuller had ‘raised grave doubts as to the scientific profundity and objectivity of the project.’ Roush therefore called for a new Congressional investigation under the auspices of the House Science and Astronautics Committee. Scheduled for July 29, it was set up more ambitiously as a symposium and included an impressive array of participants, including J. Allen Hynek, astronomer Carl Sagan, the engineer James A. Harder, an astronautics engineer, Robert M. Barker, and even the widely respected, trouble-shooting atmospheric physicist, Dr James E. McDonald. Concerning the reality or non-reality of UFOs, some of those men were sceptics, but the deliberations of the hearingsymposium resulted in a general, implied criticism of the Condon Committee and a strong recommendation for the continued study of UFOs. Ironically, the hearings came to an end during a peak period of sightings that resurrected nation-wide public and press interest in the subject.

‘Well, the hearing-symposium might have made that recommendation,’ Dwight said, also shouting against the noise, ‘but personally I’m sceptical that it’ll happen. The Condon Report has just been delivered to the National Academy of Sciences for review and it’s my belief that no matter what its conclusions are, the recommendations of the Congressional hearing-symposium will be overridden and we’ll be back where we started – with no official support for UFO investigations.’

‘You’re just a cynic,’ Scaduto said.

‘You’re like that about marriage,’ Dwight replied, ‘so I can feel free to swing that way about official UFO studies.’

‘So it goes!’ Scaduto said.

Glancing down, Dwight saw just how dense and seemingly impenetrable the

forested hills and mountain ranges were. Noticing the direction of his gaze, Lomax said, ‘You’re wondering how they could even transport an aircraft plant into these regions, right?’

‘Right.’

‘Well, it may look impenetrable from here, but inventive men can do anything, and down there, spread right across the region from Alberta to British Columbia, there are not only hidden aircraft factories, but also coal mines, the odd oil field, plants for the utilisation of natural gas, and even cleared areas for the cultivation of wheat, oats and barley. So though they’re all hidden from each other, as well as from us, that place is a hive of activity. And we’ve just started to fly over the region you’ve come here to find.’

Glancing down again, Dwight saw that they were now flying over snow-covered mountain peaks edged sharply against the azure sky, casting their shadows along the slopes of the dense, tree-covered plateau. Lomax flew them east and west, north and south, in a criss-crossing pattern, sometimes at high altitude, thus giving them excellent, panoramic visual coverage; other times at an altitude so low, Dwight thought they were going to crash, though they always made it up again, missing the canopy of the trees by what seemed like a hair’s breadth, flying through the starklyshadowed gorges where the wind howled dementedly.

They flew for a couple of hours, until early afternoon, yet saw nothing except the forests and mountain peaks. Eventually, when the three of them were in agreement that they had done enough for one day, they decided to turn back.

The Piper was already at high altitude, heading back across Alberta, when Dwight saw something glinting in the falling sun. At first he thought it was nothing special – sunlight flashing off the ice – but then, as the airplane advanced and he saw more of that glinting object, he realised that it was solid and… metallic.

‘Down there!’ he bawled.

Glancing down, Scaduto and Lomax both agreed that the object was indeed solid and metallic. Lomax immediately took the airplane down to a low altitude that enabled him to fly along a steep-sided gorge that wound dangerously through the mountain range until it came to an open area where the forest had been cleared to make way for a compact collection of stone-block workshops, pine-board administration huts and living accommodations, and what were certainly aircraft hangars.

It was an aeronautical construction plant surrounded by high barbed-wire fences and soaring cliffs... and there, on the ground, some barely perceptible in the shadowy interior of the aircraft hangars, a few exposed on landing pads on the frost-covered ground, were half-a-dozen solid, metallic, flying saucers.

They were all about 120 feet in diameter and had their pilot cabins located at the centre of gravity. None had any markings of any kind.

Dwight and Scaduto whooped and hollered with exultation as Lomax flew the Piper directly over the flying saucers and then ascended again until the aeronautical establishment had disappeared from view.

While Scaduto was frantically marking the location on his map, Lomax turned the airplane around to make another run over the flying-saucer construction plant.

‘I don’t think you should,’ Dwight warned him. ‘They might stop us the next time.’

‘We’ve got to get some photos,’ Scaduto reminded him while removing a 35mm camera with a telephoto lens from his satchel. ‘We can’t miss this one, Dwight.’

‘Damned right!’ Dwight said, now just as excited as his friend. ‘It’s too late to stop now.’

‘You’re sure you want me to go back?’ Lomax asked.

‘Yep,’ Scaduto said, withdrawing the camera from its case and screwing on its high-power, telephoto lens. ‘And fly as low as you possibly can.’

‘You want it, you’ve got it.’

Lomax turned the airplane in a wide arc until it was facing the gorge again, then he descended until he was flying below the soaring cliffs, which whipped past in a blur as he flew on, following the gorge’s dangerously winding course until the flyingsaucer construction plant came into view again. This time, as the airplane streaked above the saucers parked outside the hangars, he banked sharply to enable Scaduto to aim the camera down and snap as many pictures as the brief time allowed. Scaduto managed to click the lens-trigger five or six times before, within seconds, the Piper was nosing back up, making its swift ascent out of the gorge.

Looking backwards and downwards for his final glimpse of the construction plant, Dwight saw one of the parked saucers swaying from side to side, then lifting a few feet off the ground. Even as the snow-covered mountain peaks falling away from the ascending airplane cut off the view, he saw the saucer

shooting up vertically at tremendous speed. Before he could say a word to the others, the saucer had vanished above the clouds.

‘I just saw one take off!’ he bawled, to make himself heard above the wind’s demented howling and the roaring of the airplane’s engine. ‘It went straight up there!’

Suddenly, with a speed that defied credibility, the clouds directly above were blown apart and a dark pinprick descended in the blinking of an eye to become an immense, circular, swirling, light-flecked blackness that roared directly above them.

‘Oh, shit!’ Lomax exclaimed, instinctively covering his head with one crooked arm, assuming that the... *thing* up there was going to crash down upon the Piper.

‘It’s going to hit us!’ Scaduto bawled, as if reading Lomax’s mind.

But it didn’t. Instead, with magical precision, it stopped abruptly, mere inches above the Piper’s cockpit, and hovered there, now so enormous that it looked like an inverted whirlpool or cosmic funnel, swirling rapidly and giving off a bass humming sound.

Even though the airplane was still flying horizontally, that great mass remained directly above it.

A swirling, circular, light-flecked blackness with a glowing edge.

As the airplane continued on its horizontal course, beneath that immense, swirling, humming dark mass, Scaduto, regaining his scattered senses, raised his camera to take a photo of the UFO’s underside. Instantly, a pyramid of brilliant light shot out of the centre of the swirling blackness, temporarily blinding the three men in the cockpit. Though his eyes were closed, Scaduto was still holding his camera upwards, clicking off as many shots as he could... until the airplane started shuddering and then rocking wildly.

‘Jesus Christ!’ Lomax bawled. ‘We’re going out of control!’

Then the Piper’s engine cut out.

Miraculously, the airplane did not plummet downwards; instead, with no sound whatsoever from its engine, with only the UFO’s bass humming sound to be heard, it continued to fly on an even course, though shuddering and rocking wildly, as if held up by the pyramid of light. It flew on like this for a few seconds, but then, as abruptly as the pyramid of light had exploded over the airplane, it blinked out and, simultaneously, with a speed that defied all sense, that swirling hole of light-flecked blackness shrank to a mere dot and then disappeared into the clouds above.

Instantly, the airplane, with its engine still silent, plunged towards Earth.
‘We’re going down!’ Lomax bawled a second time.
Yet at that very moment, the engine suddenly roared back into life, as powerful as it had been before, thus lifting the airplane too quickly and throwing it into a violent, dangerous spin. As Lomax fought to regain control, the spinning airplane plunged towards the forested hills of Alberta; but eventually Lomax managed to pull it back up, control the spin, and then level it out completely, to fly on as normal.
‘That light, whatever it was, cut the engine out,’ Lomax said. ‘The light, or something above it, held us up in the air while the engine was out.’
‘Incredible precision,’ Dwight said, recalling what he had witnessed and amazed by it. ‘That saucer came down on us so fast, you could hardly see it descending; then it stopped mere inches above the cockpit and moved sideways as we were moving forward, remaining in exactly the same position above us. When it left, I hardly saw it going, it ascended so fast. I’ve never seen anything like it. It was damned miraculous.’
‘But why did the crew of the saucer let us go,’ Scaduto asked, ‘instead of wiping us out in a crash, as they could easily have done and, indeed, almost did?’
‘Because they’re assuming that if we report the sighting,’ Dwight replied, ‘we won’t be believed and might even become laughing stocks. If they’d made us crash, on the other hand, that crash would have been investigated and that, in turn, could have led the authorities to that secret flying-saucer construction plant. That’s what they were hoping to avoid when they let us go.’
‘Hoping?’ Lomax asked.
‘Yes,’ Scaduto said. ‘Presumably it never entered their heads that at last we have proof of their existence.’ He held the camera up and grinned. ‘We photographed the saucers.’
‘Hallelujah!’ Dwight said.
They were flown back to Calgary with all possible speed, stunned and thrilled by the experience they’d just had, exhilarated at finally having the evidence they had been seeking for years.

When they had returned to Dayton, Ohio, a few days later, they learned, as Dwight had guessed, that the Condon Report, which had just been released, had savaged the UFOlogists, mocked those who had criticised the

committee's project before the report was in, vilified the other UFO research programmes, and recommended the closing down of Project Blue Book.

They also learned, when Scaduto processed the photos he had taken of the swirling, light-flecked, black base of the 120-foot flying saucer, that the film had been lightly scorched and the negatives destroyed while still in the camera.

'It was the light,' Dwight said bitterly.

Chapter Forty-Five

In March, 1969, Fuller attended a meeting at Air Force Headquarters in Washington DC with representatives of the Air Defence Command, the Air Force Systems Command, the Office of Aerospace Research, the Office of Scientific Research, and the Office of Information. Not required to be present for the first half of the meeting, which was closed even to him, he arrived just as most of the gold-braids were into their second or third whisky, bourbon or brandy and puffing clouds of smoke from fat Havana cigars, all paid for by the unwitting taxpayer. Looking at the faces of those seated around the long table, some reasonably decent, most the sagging, untrustworthy masks of those who have told a lot of lies and learned to live with them, Fuller was not overly impressed and decided that his own brand of patriotic vice was at least emotionally less stultifying.

'Welcome, Mr Fuller,' an Air Force Systems Command general said when Fuller finally entered the room. 'The meeting's over, so what was it you wanted to ask?'

'I have to report to Wilson, sir, about your recommendations regarding the Condon Report.'

'Christ, I wish we could get ahead of that bastard and blow him away,' the representative of the Air Defence Command said vehemently.

'We might eventually get to do that, sir,' Fuller said, 'but we still have a long way to go.'

'Unfortunately, that's true.'

'So what are your recommendations, sir? I have to pass them on to Wilson.'

'We've chosen to ignore the widespread criticism of the Condon Report and instead implement its recommendations.'

'I welcome that decision, sir. I'm sure Wilson will be pleased. But I have to remind you that since those recommendations have already been widely criticised, we have to be particularly careful about how we handle this matter.'

‘The report was viewed thus by the civilian UFO groups and UFOlogists, neither of whom concern us here.’
‘The report was also widely attacked by the media.’
‘The media is filled with communists, Fuller, so we can safely ignore it. Frankly, we’re more concerned with not offending Wilson than we are with inciting squeals of rage from reds under the beds.’
‘What about Project Blue Book?’
‘It’s been officially closed down at this meeting. Project Blue Book is dead and buried.’
‘I have to say, sir,’ said the representative of the Office of Scientific Research, ‘that I strongly disagree with closing Project Blue Book down completely. I agree that interest in UFOlogy must be dampened, but Project Blue Book now has historical roots and should be preserved in some form, no matter how modest, to give the illusion that we did, at least originally, sincerely believe in it.’
‘I agree,’ Fuller said, ‘and even presented the notion to Wilson. He replied by saying that all roots, even historical ones, die quickly and crumble to dust when torn from the ground – so he insisted that we kill Project Blue Book entirely.’
‘Do we have to do *everything* that bastard says?’ asked the representative from the Office of Information.
‘For the time being, yes,’ Fuller said. ‘I should perhaps remind you that Wilson has kept his promise by ensuring that the US is in the lead in the space race and that an American, Neil Armstrong, will certainly be walking on the Moon this coming July – the first man in history to do so.’
‘I second that motion,’ said the gold-braided representative of the Office of Aerospace Research. ‘Even though we pay dearly, we *have* been given some invaluable aid from Wilson, so we must keep him happy until we’re perfectly sure we can move successfully against him.’
‘Exactly,’ Fuller said. ‘And it’s also my belief that the Project Blue Book records should be made as inaccessible as possible, to make life difficult for future researchers. Any suggestions?’
‘Yes,’ said the representative of the Office of Information. ‘I recommend Maxwell AFB in Montgomery, Alabama. It’s not a place too many people want to visit unless they really have to. Also, those southern officers are notoriously prickly to deal with and even hardened researchers give up more often than not when trying to get something out of them.’

‘That’s fine by me,’ Fuller said. ‘Anything else to pass on to Wilson?’
‘No,’ the chorus came back from that cloud of cigar smoke.
‘Fine,’ Fuller said. ‘Thank you, gentlemen.’
Leaving the meeting, he drove to a dark field in a pastoral, desolate area of Virginia. He sat patiently in his car until a flying saucer, infinitely more advanced than the US-Canadian saucers he was protecting, landed nearby in the same field. It descended silently, with no lights flashing, and was only revealed by the moonlight shining off its silvery, cathedral-like dome. When the front ramp fell down, the interior light beaming out was unusually weak and would have shown little to drivers passing by on the distant road.
Wilson emerged from that light, flanked as usual by armed cyborgs. He wore his customary faint smile of disdain when he walked up to Fuller.
His greeting was: ‘So what did they say?’
Fuller told him what had taken place at the meeting in Air Force Headquarters. Wilson was pleased, but wanted to know what President Nixon thought about the UFO situation in general and him in particular.
‘Nixon’s the supreme pragmatist,’ Fuller said. ‘and accepts the status quo. He doesn’t like it, but he accepts the necessity of dealing with you. No need for anxieties there, Wilson.’
‘There’s no-one more pragmatic than me,’ Wilson replied, ‘and I *never* suffer anxieties.’
Ignoring the remark, Fuller removed a piece of notepaper from his billfold. He checked the details written on it, then returned it to the billfold and put the billfold back into his pocket.
‘I thought I should tell you,’ he said to Wilson, ‘that Tony Scaduto, the UFO researcher I mentioned to you before...’
‘He works for NICAP,’ Wilson interjected impatiently, ‘but also does a lot on the side for Dr Epstein’s APII.’
‘Yes,’ Fuller said, ‘that’s the one.’
‘What about him?’
‘He recently flew to Calgary, Canada, with that former ATIC officer and present APII investigator, Dwight Randall. As I’d already had them placed under CIA observation, I can confirm that they were met at Calgary airport by a private flighttrainer, Hank Lomax, and taken by him to his flight-training school, located north of Calgary. From there, the three of them flew in Lomax’s personal Piper *Tri-Pacer* to Alberta and then, more dangerously, over a US-Canadian flying saucer production plant in British Columbia.

There, after clearly viewing the saucers resting outside the hangars – the advanced, 120-foot saucers recently delivered by you – the airplane was pursued and harassed until it left the area.'
'Do you think they took photos before they left the area?'
'We assume so. But a laser-beam weapon activated from our pursuing saucer would have put paid to their film.'
'Very good.'
'Do you think we should do something about those men?' Fuller asked.
'Just scare them for now,' Wilson replied. 'I don't want to be involved. But if your fright tactics don't make them shut their mouths, let me know and I'll deal with them as I've recently dealt with that increasingly irksome troublemaker, Dr James E. McDonald.'
'McDonald's still around,' Fuller said.
'He's an illusion,' Wilson said.
Instead of explaining what he meant by that cryptic remark, he changed the subject by pointing out that since American astronauts had recently orbited the moon in the Apollo 8 spacecraft and would, indeed, soon be actually taking their first steps upon it, he wanted no reports to leak out regarding the debris of his own previous landings there. He insisted, furthermore, that the UFO reports being submitted with increasing frequency by astronauts were to be treated as the sightings of previously unseen natural cosmic phenomena.
When Fuller agreed, Wilson returned to his flying saucer, leaving the otherwise cynical CIA agent to stare in wonder at its magical ascent until it was lost in the stars.
Time moved on, Fuller realised.

Chapter Forty-Six

A deeply shocked Dwight felt that he was reliving his life. Back in 1952, with his late friend, Bob Jackson, he had passed a newspaper stand in Washington National Airport Terminal Building, seen from the headlines that UFOs had invaded the capital, and felt outrage that he had not been informed. Now, with his old friend long gone, he saw from the headlines, dated December 17, 1969, in the very same airport terminal, that the Secretary of the Air Force, Robert G. Seamans Jr., had just officially announced the termination of Project Blue Book and the Air Force's twenty-two-year study of UFOs.

With his shock rapidly turning into disbelief, reluctant acceptance, anger and despair, Dwight caught a cab and continued on his journey to what could be a crucial meeting with Tony Scaduto. He was dropped off outside a nondescript bar in M Street, not far from where Bob Jackson had died of a ‘heart attack’ that Dwight then, and now, believed had been murder.

The formerly flamboyant Scaduto was like a different man. Dressed like a HaightAshbury hippie, he was smoking a joint of marijuana, drinking too much, and listening, stoned, to a jukebox playing Zager and Evans, Blood, Sweat and Tears, the Rolling Stones, and Jethro Tull, while psychedelic lights flashed on and off the walls. He was also practically gibbering with fear.

‘I tell you, man, wow, right,’ he babbled, inhaling, exhaling, glancing left and right, avoiding Dwight’s accusing gaze and determinedly *not* raising the subject of UFOs or the termination of Project Blue Book. ‘What a year, right? I mean, I really dig it that a US astronaut’s just become the first motherfucker to land on the moon and that just last month two more astronauts did the same. Superheroes, those guys.’

‘There are no superheroes,’ Dwight said, already beginning to despair of this conversation; wondering what had happened in the past year to change his young friend so drastically.

‘Yeah, well, right,’ Scaduto continued, rambling while sucking on Mary Jane, putting his head back, closing his eyes, then exhaling slowly, ecstatically. ‘Yeah, but we really beat those goddamned Russkies in the end. That’s one hell of a thing, right?’

‘Right,’ Dwight said. ‘But I really wanted to talk about the termination of Project

Blue Book.’

‘Yeah? Well, you know, I really don’t know anything about that, man. I mean,

what the fuck, they’ve been trying to kill it off for years, and it was practically dead

on its feet even before it was finally terminated. Not much lost anymore, right?’ ‘Who do you think was behind it? Jack Fuller’s boys?’

‘Yeah, probably, but who knows? I mean, I don’t wanna know anymore. And neither do you, man. You shouldn’t be goin’ around askin’ questions like that. Things

like that can be messy.’

‘I haven’t heard from you in a long time, Tony. You don’t reply to my letters anymore. You never answer the telephone. Have you given up your UFO work?’ ‘Yeah, right, I gave it up.’
‘Why’s that?’
‘I just got fed up with it, is all. I mean, I just got the urge to do other things.’
Scaduto raised his fat joint in the air, waved it, then giggled. ‘Yeah, man, other
things.’
‘You didn’t just get interested in other things, Tony. Tell the truth: you got scared.’ ‘Bullshit!’
‘You’re scared right this second.’
‘Just stoned, man. Bit sweaty. Fuckin’ hot in here. And those lights, man, they
make your heart race. It’s the new generation.’
‘You’re a bit old for it, Tony.’
‘I’m okay. I still pull the chicks.’
‘The use of that word “chicks” already dates you.’
‘Okay, man, just lay off.’
Flickering constantly, rapidly in the gloom, like the lights seen on so many UFOs,
the psychedelic lights in this crowded bar were creating bizarre patterns on the walls
and on the bodies, faces and limbs of the young people packed tightly together, most
wearing hippie clothes – baubles, bangles and beads – and having shouted
conversations to defeat the pounding rock music. The sweet scent of pot filled the
smokey air. In the disorientating, kaleidoscopic lights, Scaduto looked gaunt and
haunted.
Determined to get to the bottom of his young friend’s fall from grace, Dwight
ploughed ahead. ‘So why are you frightened? Did they get to you, Tony?’
Scaduto sighed, releasing smoke through his nostrils. ‘Okay, man, I confess. I
recently received a visit from three bastards wearing black suits. They claimed to be

CIA agents, scared the hell out of me, and demanded that I drop my UFO investigations and forget what I saw over British Columbia. They said that if I ever flew over British Columbia again, I wouldn't come back. They also told me that they knew Hank Lomax had flown the plane, then they told me to give you their regards.' Dwight was shocked almost rigid. Sitting up straight in his chair behind the small, round table, he found himself squinting instinctively into the flashing strobe lights, trying to see if he was being observed. Realising that he had become paranoid again, on the instant, he then understood, also, just why Scaduto was behaving in this manner. Yes, Scaduto was helplessly frightened – just like he, Dwight, was. Oh, God, he thought, not again.

Trying to get a grip on himself, he said, 'For the flight from Dayton to Calgary, I was listed under another name. I wasn't listed at all for Lomax's flight. So how the hell could they have known I was present?'

Scaduto threw his hands up in the air, pleading ignorance. 'I swear to God, man, I didn't tell them. If they'd asked, I think I would have, 'cause I was so damned scared, you know? But they didn't ask – they *told* me. Yeah, they told me they knew Lomax was the pilot of the *Tri-Pacer*. Then they said – kinda grinning maliciously – to pass on their regards to you, mentioning you by name. So they knew you were there.' 'Jesus Christ! *How?*'

'I think it was the beam of light. You remember? That pyramid of light that beamed down from the saucer to cut the plane's engine while somehow keeping us up there in the air, still moving forward. That light scorched and destroyed the film in my camera, thus destroying our sole source of proof for the existence of the manmade flying saucers. And I think it also somehow photographed us – or, at least,

beamed up an image of us to the flying saucer. They identified us from that.’
‘Oh, my God,’ Dwight said, briefly covering his face with his hands and now
feeling as frightened as Scaduto looked. ‘What have I done?’ He removed his hands
from his face and stared straight at Scaduto who, in the disorientating, kaleidoscopic
strobe lights, looked oddly inhuman. ‘What about Beth?’
Scaduto leaned across the table, holding his thick joint between the fingers of one
hand while using the other to grab hold of Dwight and shake some sense into
him. ‘Fuck flying saucers,’ he said to Dwight. ‘I just want to stay alive. And so should
you, man. For your own sake. For Beth’s sake. This is the last time we meet, Dwight.
Don’t ever try contacting me again. I don’t exist. I’m invisible. Good luck.
Adios.’ He gave Dwight a gentle shove. Dwight pushed his chair and stood up to hurry out
of the bar. Once outside, on the busy sidewalk, in the afternoon’s wintry light, he
caught a taxi straight to the airport. There, instead of catching his return flight to
Dayton, Ohio, he took the next plane to Phoenix, Arizona. He had a window seat and
during the whole flight he couldn’t take his eyes off the sky. He kept imagining he
was seeing flying saucers moving silently, eerily through the clouds, but nothing
materialised.

Arriving in Phoenix late that evening, Dwight hired a car and drove to a residential area near the University of Arizona, where he booked into a motel for the night. He did not sleep well. Rushing back in upon him, as if stirred by his talk with the equally frightened Tony Scaduto, were all the old dreams of flying saucers and mysterious men in black. Mixed in with such dreams were dreadful visions of Beth surrounded by silent creatures, some human, others alien, bathed in a radiant white light and being probed in the most private places with what looked like surgical instruments. He thought

he could hear Beth screaming. In fact, it was himself. He awoke more than once in that interminable, sweaty night, either groaning or screaming.

At ten the following morning, after a breakfast of black coffee (since he could not stomach even the idea of food) and after making a quick call to check that Beth was okay, he drove to the University of Arizona and was escorted to his pre-arranged meeting with Dr James E. McDonald.

Over the past few years, McDonald, who was strongly pro-UFO and anti-CIA, had become a thorn in the side of the latter, as well as the Air Force. This had led him into taking up freelance work for the APII and it was through this work that Dwight had gotten to know him and respect him. Though very much the scientist, living in a cloistered world, McDonald had taken the bit in his teeth and gone out to fight all those in the CIA and the Air Force who were trying to stifle information about UFOs and intimidate or harass witnesses. He had done so with tremendous energy and a surprising knack for gaining publicity, thus placing the APII more vividly on the map, even while making himself a leading target for those he was exposing. Dwight had to admire that.

Now, however, entering McDonald's office, Dwight was shocked to find that McDonald had changed almost as drastically as Scaduto. A kind-faced, academic man with short-cropped hair and spectacles, he had recently lost a lot of weight and looked like someone in a state of permanent exhaustion. Behind the spectacles, his eyes seemed slightly glassy and distracted, possibly even fearful.

After welcoming Dwight into his office as warmly as possible, given his condition, he confessed that he no longer wished to discuss UFOs and had, indeed, almost refused Dwight this meeting.

'So why did you change your mind and let me come?' Dwight asked, when he was seated in the chair in front of McDonald's desk.

McDonald shrugged and smiled with what seemed like an air of sadness. 'I guess in deference to all we shared in the past. By which I mean our joint work for the APII.'

'You were doing so well,' Dwight said, 'then you suddenly stopped. Why was that, James?'

McDonald stared steadily at him for a moment, then shrugged again, this time forlornly. 'No reason, Dwight.'

'You look terrible,' Dwight said bluntly. 'You look sleepless. What happened, James?'

McDonald was silent for what seemed like an eternity, his gaze focused on the ceiling, then he sighed with what could only be deemed despair and lowered his gaze to look at Dwight – not directly at him, but as near to that as he could manage in his state of chronic distraction.
‘All right,’ he said. ‘In deference to our friendship, I’ll tell you this once, off the record, but on the condition that you never visit me again.’
‘Never?’
‘Never.’
Though immeasurably shocked, recalling Scaduto’s dismissal the previous day, Dwight nodded: ‘Okay, I promise.’
There was another lengthy silence from McDonald, as if he was struggling to find the courage to speak, but eventually, with another mournful sigh, he said: ‘About the middle of March last year – I can’t recall the exact date – I went for a night drive into the desert just outside Phoenix, which is something I’ve done often in my life, for relaxation. That particular night, however, I blacked out. I awakened fifty miles from where I had remembered driving... and my car was pointing back in the direction of home.’
‘Just like Beth,’ Dwight said.
‘Exactly.’ McDonald clasped his hands together, placed them on his desk, and studied them distractedly for some time, before eventually continuing: ‘From that day on, I’ve been suffering from dreadful headaches, or migraines, and from the conviction that I’m being observed constantly, in some inexplicable manner. This conviction is so strong that often I think I’m going mad. It’s given me a lot of sleepless nights – in fact, now I’m almost permanently exhausted – and naturally this, apart from its effect on me and my family, hasn’t helped when it comes to dealing with what’s presently going down.’
‘What’s that?’ Dwight asked.
When McDonald next sighed, Dwight realised that it wasn’t really a sigh: it was the gasping for breath that denotes the fierce repression of panic. McDonald spoke softly, in short bursts, catching breaths in between.
‘As you know, since the implementation of the Condon Report recommendations... notably the closing of Project Blue Book and all other... UFO investigations... the forgotten UFO controversy has practically become a... a... forgotten issue in the press.’
‘Yes, I know.’

‘Behind the scenes, however,’ McDonald continued, gradually regaining control of his panicky breathing, ‘the ridicule attached to the study of UFOs has actually... increased. For that reason, as I was still insisting that UFOs were physical, metallic objects and their origins possibly known to the Air Force, I was... ridiculed relentlessly at committee hearings and in the institute as...’ He shook his head in unutterable despair and humiliation. ‘As a man who believes in little green men and other science fiction or comic book inventions. Now most of my serious work is being ignored and my career is in… jeopardy.’ He glanced down at his desk again, studying his hands, then managed to redirect his troubled gaze to Dwight. ‘If what happened to me in that desert is the same as what happened to Beth, then God knows what they did to me when they got to me. I feel that I’m being… controlled. Not just watched, but… manipulated. And now, like Beth, I’m haunted by dreams of UFOs and men in black – of being inside a flying saucer, surrounded, blacking out. And because of that I’m now exhausted from lack of sleep, my career’s crumbling, and my marriage is rapidly breaking down. I’m in trouble in more ways than one, Dwight, and that’s why this is finished... So… I’ve told you. Now don’t ever come back here. I’m sorry, Dwight. Goodbye... and good luck.’

Feeling as if he was going mad, Dwight stood up, shook McDonald’s hand, then left the building. After driving too quickly, dangerously, to the airport, he commenced the first leg of his journey back to Dayton, Ohio.

As with the flight in, he asked for a window seat and spent the whole of both flights staring through the window at the clouds below. He kept thinking there were objects down there, but again nothing materialised.

Feeling ever more fearful, Dwight picked up his car where he had left it in the airport in Dayton and headed for home as quickly as possible, growing ever more fearful for Beth’s welfare.

It was already dark when he left the airport. Once away from the ugly clutter of the industrial belt, with its gas stations, warehouses, and factories for the production of refrigerators, air-conditioning equipment, cash registers, machine tools and, especially, aircraft instruments, the land became emptier, mostly agricultural land, pretty in the daytime, but flat and featureless in the darkness, though the sky contained a large moon and a spectacular display of stars. There were few clouds – just some candyfloss wisps here and there – but enough to cast shifting shadows on the broad, moonlit fields.

Dwight drove pretty fast, too frightened for Beth to be careful, trying to distract himself with the feeling of power, of magical omnipotence, that came with being isolated from the world while moving through it at great speed. He normally loved the land at night, the play of shadow and light, but tonight, given the couple of days he'd just had, he felt threatened by it.

Then he started feeling odd... no longer alone... aware of some unseen presence. 'What the hell...?'

He spoke aloud to break the silence, suddenly frightened of being alone out here,

then he instinctively glanced at his rear-view mirror.

He saw only dark clouds crossing the stars and reaching out to gently stroke the moon.

Nothing else... just the darkness... the stars seeming to move away… the sky unfolding radiantly in his wake as the car barrelled forward. Nothing else in the mirror...

Yet his heart started racing.

He glanced left and right, convinced that something was out there. Seeing nothing, he glanced up, where there was nothing unusual, so once more he concentrated on the road straight ahead, uncomfortably aware that he had started sweating.

'Damn it, Dwight!' he whispered to himself. 'It's just your overwrought imagination – that's a dangerous thing.'

Talking to himself... Speaking aloud to calm his nerves... There was nothing out there but moonlit darkness, starlit sky, shifting shadows...

No, something *was* out there... What was that? Something moving... A flashing light... Growing bigger... Approaching.

Yes, damn it, *approaching*!

He saw the light, then it was gone, though it hadn't flashed on and off. It had flown from east to west at tremendous speed, then maybe shot upwards – so fast it just disappeared.

Where was it now?

Dwight felt his skin crawling with a dreadful, clammy fear. He was aware of something out there. He couldn't see it, but he could *feel* it, and his hands became slippery on the steering wheel as his heart raced in panic.

'Imagination!' he whispered again, trying vainly to convince himself that this was the truth... Then, as his helpless fear deepened, something flashed in his eyes.

He almost swerved off the road, but blinked and straightened out. He squinted into the darkness, trying to see between the headlights. Seeing nothing, he looked to the side.

A pool of light was brightening on the road beside the car, keeping abreast of it, speeding along and growing brighter and wider until it covered the whole road.

Dwight glanced up and was blinded by dazzling light... then he lost control of the car.

‘Damn!’ he exclaimed, his voice reverberating in his head as he fought with the steering wheel and the car swerved off the road, out of the light beaming down, then back onto the road and into the light again. ‘Jesus Christ! What the...?’

The light disappeard abruptly. The car barrelled into the darkness. Its headlights had gone out and Dwight frantically worked the switch... and then a bass humming sound, an infrasound, almost *physical*, filled the car and tightened around his head as the engine cut out.

Dwight slammed on the brakes. He went into a skid, managed to straighten out, and was slowing down when something passed above him, shot into the darkness ahead, then became an enormous, burning globe that froze right in front of him.

The car came to a halt. It just rolled to a stop. Dwight sat there, hardly believing what he was seeing, but too stunned to move.

He was looking at a huge, slightly glowing flying saucer that was hovering in midair farther along the road, almost as wide as the road. It had a silvery, metallic appearance, no surface protuberances, and possessed a perfectly seamless surface beneath that eerie white glowing.

Dwight sat in the car, too stunned to move, mesmerized as the flying saucer sank lower and settled on the ground. It didn’t appear to have any legs – it just settled down on its base. No, not quite on the ground: a few inches above it; hovering just above the ground. Then the bass humming sound increased, tightening around Dwight’s head, as he saw a large panel opening up in the sloping surface of the saucer, emitting a brilliant light, then falling forward to form a ramp that led down to the ground.

Three figures walked down the ramp, the smaller two moving awkwardly, to spread out across the road and make their way to the car.

Dwight was terrified. The middle figure was a tall, slim human being dressed all in black, but the other two, one on each side of him, were

creatures little more than fourfoot tall, wearing silvery-grey coveralls, but with studded helmets on their heads, lower faces made of moulded metal and devoid of noses or lips, and hands that looked from Dwight's point of view like vicious steel claws.
They looked like creatures from another world.
As they deliberately advanced upon Dwight, spreading out as they came closer, emerging from silhouette, he wanted to get out of the car and flee, but he felt paralysed.
Then the infrasound faded away and the tightness left his head. Instantly, he reached out for the ignition key and turned it, but heard only a dead click. Jerking his hand away, imagining that it had been scorched, he tried to still his racing heart as he waited for the two alien creatures and the man in the middle to reach the car.
One of the alien creatures stopped right in front of the car, the other went to the far side, and the tall, silvery-haired man dressed all in black walked around to stop by Dwight's door.
When he bent down to look through the window, Dwight wanted to scream.
'Roll the window down, Dwight.'
The man's voice was almost a whisper. It was also oddly flat. It was the voice of a man with no feelings but a lot of authority. Dwight did as he was told. He didn't seem to have a choice. That voice, though quiet and unemotional, would brook no disobedience. Dwight rolled the window down, his hand shaking, then he stared at the man.
He had silvery-grey hair, unnaturally smooth white skin, curiously immobile, handsome features and icy blue eyes.
'You're Dwight Randall,' he said.
'That's right,' Dwight responded.
'You were with Project Blue Book at the ATIC, then you worked for the APII.'
'That's right as well,' Dwight said.
The man smiled without warmth. 'You also flew over a construction plant in British Columbia and saw some of our saucers.'
'Yes,' Dwight confessed.
'You will stop this, Dwight. From this moment on. You've already done considerable damage to your wife, and could do a lot more. As for your friends, Tony Scaduto and the meddlesome Dr McDonald, you've seen the state they're in – and let me assure you that they're going to get much worse.

Is that what you want for yourself, Dwight?'
'No.'
'For your wife?'
'No.'
'Your daighter?'
'Please, no!'
'Well, if you don't want that to happen to your wife and daughter, not to mention yourself, you must stop your involvement with UFOs and never return to it. Do you understand?'
'Yes.'
'Good. However, just as a precaution, Dwight, to ensure that you keep your promise, I'm going to give you a final warning. Not right now. Not this year. Maybe next year. It will happen when we feel that you've had enough time to consider all this and have to make a decision about whether or not to stay silent about us. This warning will help you make the right decision should you be feeling less fearful.'
'What kind of warning?' Dwight asked.
The man offered his chilling smile. 'Wait for word about your friend Dr James E.McDonald. When it comes, you will know. That will be your final warning. The next in line will be you and your family, should you ever again displease us. Do you understand?'
'Yes.'
'Then return to your home and look after your family. Goodnight, Dwight. Goodbye.'
Dwight felt that he was dreaming. In his dream the fear returned. He kept thinking of Beth and Nichola, of that warning, and then he knew for certain that he would stop here.
'Goodnight,' he replied.
The tall, silvery-haired man with the oddly immobile features offered another chilling smile and a nod before walking away with his two hideous cyborgs, back to the enormous flying saucer. He and the cyborgs walked up the ramp and disappeared back into the saucer's brilliantly lit holding bay while Dwight sat on in the car, still unable to move. The saucer's ramp lifted up and folded back in until it again became part of the seamless body, cutting off the light and leaving the saucer to reflect the moonlight from its metallic surface. Then Dwight heard the bass humming sound, almost *felt* it, an infrasound again, and as his head started tightening, as his skin turned

numb, the flying saucer started glowing, its silvery body brightening magically, until it became encased in a cocoon of pulsating white light and lifted off the ground.

Dwight heard the noise, *felt* it, was surrounded by it and became part of it, as the saucer ascended slowly, gracefully – yes, even majestically. Then it abruptly shot upwards, about a hundred feet up, but stopped again, just as abruptly, as if by pure magic, to hover high above and to the side, where he could just about see it.

The infrasound cut out, allowing Dwight to move again, though he didn't dare get out of the car. The saucer looked small up there, about the size of a dime, and it seemed to be spinning on its vertical axis and filling the sky with light. Then it shot up even higher, shrinking rapidly, but still shining, until eventually it merged with the stars and suddenly blinked out.

Dwight saw the moon and stars, the vast web of the cosmos. They made him think of the beauty and terror of life... and of those whom he most loved and who were obviously most threatened: Beth, Nichola, and Nichola's baby, still only eight months old.

Determined to protect them, he turned the ignition key, heaved a sigh of relief when the engine came on, and drove home as quickly as possible, obsessed with the notion that his family might have been visited by the man who had just left and, even worse, that they might be captives in that flying saucer this very moment.

He was therefore overwhelmed with gratitude and love when he found that Beth, though telling him that she had been visited by men in black and tormented by a UFO that circled over the house the previous evening, was unharmed, as were Nichola, her husband, Larry, and their baby, named after Bob Jackson.

Nevertheless, when he took Beth in his arms to kiss her, he knew that both of them were still in danger and would probably remain so for the rest of their days. Though he suspected that he could never hide from that nameless man for long, he was determined to try.

'We're selling up and going to Oregon,' he told Beth, 'where you've always wanted to live. It's time we moved on.'

'I understand,' Beth responded. 'It's all ended, hasn't it?'

'Yes,' Dwight said. 'It's ended.'

His kiss told her the rest of it: that love, which could not protect a single soul

in the world, could at least heal old wounds and soothe fear. It was a kiss of renewal.

Chapter Forty-Seven

Eighteen months later, in June, 1971, Dwight had settled comfortably into his new life with Beth, Nichola, her husband Larry and baby Bob in a rambling old farmhouse in Vida, Oregon. Out of deference to Nichola's fears for her own child, as well as for Dwight and Beth, Larry had generously agreed to give up his job as a civilian engineer with Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton, Ohio, and move with them in relative anonymity to Oregon, where he settled for a job as a maintenance engineer with a private airline that combined commercial flights to local towns with cropdusting. Dwight, on the other hand, was happy to get a job as a truck driver, delivering farm produce to the shops of the various small towns in the area. Nichola looked after baby Bob, while Beth looked after Nichola and the baby, as well as tending the house. All in all, it was a quiet, pleasant life in pastoral, postcard countryside dominated by the spectacular Cascades mountain range where, as Dwight often recalled, some of the earliest and most famous flying saucer sightings had been made.

Dwight knew in his heart of hearts that if that nameless, silvery-haired man or any of his equally mysterious friends wanted to find him, they would doubtless be able to do so – and, indeed, probably knew where he was right now. Nevertheless, the move to Oregon had not only been made to satisfy one of Beth's oldest desires – she had always yearned to live in Oregon – but to let 'them' out there know that Dwight had moved away from all his former associates and was now living in relative obscurity.

In other words, he was telling 'them' that he had well and truly retired from the UFO business.

As if being thanked for keeping his word, Dwight was pleased to note that Beth's nightmares and physical 'hauntings' had ceased within days of their leaving Dayton and had not returned in the eighteen months they had been living in Oregon. As for himself, since leaving Dayton he had not seen or heard anything of a disturbing nature, and he was grateful for that.

During that eighteen months, few days had gone by when Dwight did not think of the many years he had spent in search of UFOs, but he certainly harboured few regrets. Gradually, however, as the more frightening recollections began to dim in his memory – or, at least, to seem less frightening than they had been at the time – he began to think increasingly

about finding a way to impart all he had learned about the man-made flying saucers to those who could use the information best, notably Dr Frederick Epstein and Robert Stanford of the APII in Washington DC.
Mere weeks after he had commenced this line of thought, he was reminded of that nameless, silvery-haired man's threat to send him a warning through Dr James E. McDonald.
He started thinking about that warning about a week before the warning actually came. Wondering why, suddenly, he could not get Dr McDonald out of his head, he endured an emotionally troubled week, then decided to take a day off and go fishing in the local lake. Arising just after dawn, he drove into Vida, picked up the local newspaper, then drove on to the lake. Still sitting in his car, he poured a cup of hot coffee from his thermos flask, then settled back at the steering wheel to read the newspaper.
Instantly shocked, he sat forward again, resting the newspaper on the steering wheel to prevent it from shaking.
The first page contained an article stating that two days ago, Dr James E.McDonald, B.A. in Chemistry, M.S. in Meteorology, Ph.D. in Physics, Professor of the Department of Meteorology, and Senior Physicist at the Institute of Atmospheric Physics of the University of Arizona, after suffering from depression and a broken marriage, had committed suicide by driving out into the desert in the middle of the night and shooting himself in the head with a pistol
Shocked, Dwight let the newspaper slide off the steering wheel, onto his feet, as he stared over the lake, at the Cascades soaring beyond it, thinking about what he had been told through what he had read.
Dwight was absolutely convinced that McDonald, though he may indeed have shot himself, had not committed suicide – he had merely pulled the trigger. Though the evidence would never come in, Dwight sat there in his car, looking at the distant Cascades, where the whole UFO flap had first begun, and tried imagining the most likely scenario, given what McDonald had previously told him.
Dwight's hypothesis, based on his own knowledge of UFO abductions, Beth's personal experience, and McDonald's confession to him, was as follows...

Already in a bad way after a combination of overt Air Force and CIA harassment and inexplicable set-backs in his formerly illustrious career, then suffering additionally from severe depression and a broken marriage,

McDonald awakens in the middle of the night, puts on his normal clothes, including suit, shirt and tie, and goes down to his kitchen for a hot drink. Sipping his coffee, he recalls the visit he had from the impassioned Dwight Randall who, like him, had gradually become obsessed with UFOs. McDonald then broods on how a relentless barrage of private and public ridicule is being used against him, to discredit his professional credibility.

Of all the ridicule he has suffered, nothing has been worse than when the House Committee on Appropriations called him to testify about the supersonic transport (SST) plane and how its use would affect the atmosphere. McDonald had discovered (correctly) that the SST would reduce the protective layer of ozone in the atmosphere and that this could cause an additional 10,000 cases of skin cancer each year in the United States, as well as having other dramatic effects on animals, crops and the weather.

During his testimony, however, McDonald was constantly ridiculed as a believer in flying saucers and ‘little men flying around the sky’ and treated generally as someone deranged.

Sitting at his kitchen table in the middle of the night, brooding about this, as well as the loss of his wife and career, McDonald takes a pistol out of a drawer under the table and thoughtfully studies it. As he does so, an almost palpable bass humming noise, an infrasound, fills the room and an eerie, pulsating light pours in through the window. McDonald clutches his head and moans in pain until the light and sound fade away. He then looks up with tears in his eyes and walks out of the house, still carrying the pistol.

McDonald gets into his car and then drives into the desert beyond Phoenix, taking the same route he had taken a few years ago when he had first blacked out during a night ride.

He parks in the middle of the desert and stares up at the vast, star-filled sky. An enormous UFO in a pulsating aura that changes repeatedly through the whole spectrum, filling the night with colour and light, descends until it is hovering just above him, blotting out the glorious sky and revealing only a pitch-black, swirling base that appears to have no depth.

As McDonald stares up at the terrible beauty of that sight, he has fragmented recollections of being picked up by the same craft when last he parked here...of being carried up to the stars... and of being deposited back on Earth much later, his head as tight as a drum.

Eventually, as the infrasound increases, deafening him, while making his

head tighten even more, creating appalling pain, McDonald obeys an inner voice – the one voice he cannot resist – and helplessly raises the pistol to his head and presses the trigger.
His last memory – if such it can be called – is of an exploding galaxy.
He falls forward and dies.

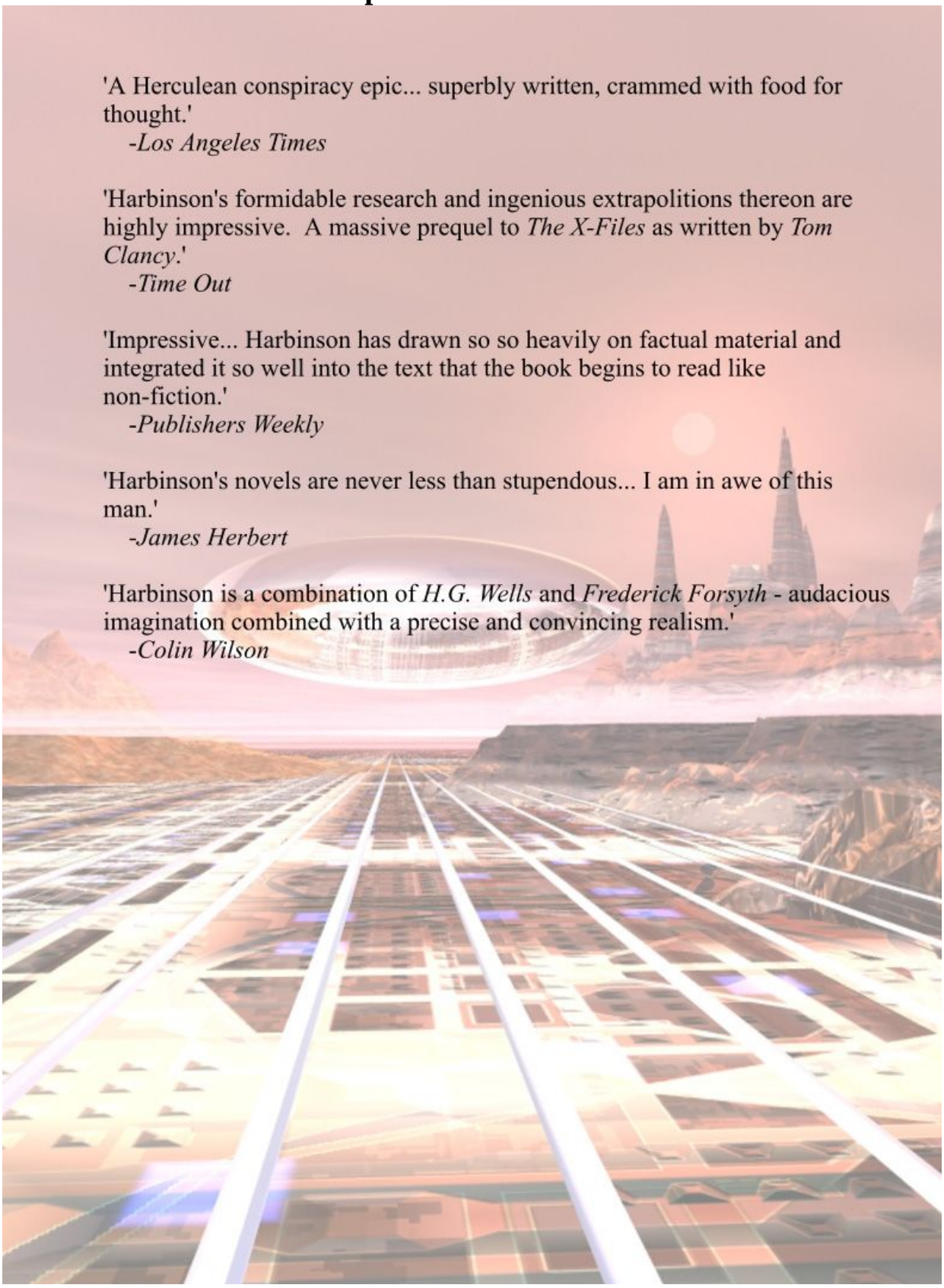
Dr James E.McDonald was now only an illusion of the mind, a warning to Dwight that he should not change *his* mind and attempt to pass on his secrets to Dr Frederick Epstein, Robert Stanford, or anyone else.

Thus, when Dwight, still in his car, managed to regain control of himself and shake off his shock, he lifted the newspaper off his rubber boots, clambered out of the vehicle, threw the newspaper into a rubbish bin and then walked down to the edge of the lake. Once there, he climbed carefully into his boat, rowed out to the centre of that great bowl of water, then unreeled his line and sat down to fish, surrounded by the Cascades. Thoroughly distracted, he let the boat drift where it would as he gazed at the sky above the distant, snow-capped mountain peaks.

He had the distinct feeling that the flying saucers were still out there, gliding eerily through the clouds, keeping him under surveillance... and he knew that this feeling would haunt him for the rest of his days.

He sat there all day, drifting aimlessly in the boat, patiently waiting for the stars to come out... and even then, he did not move.
He could not feel safe even out here.
It was best to be silent.

W.A. Harbinson Website http://www.waharbinson.eu.com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